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SRI AUROBINDO
AND
THE NEW AGE

BY
ANILBARAN ROY

LONDON
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21, CECIL COURT, CHARRING CROSS ROAD, W. C. 2.

First Published in 1940.

Agents in India

GITA PRACHAR KARYALAYA

108/11, Monoharpooker Road, Kalighat, Calcutta.

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PRINTED IN INDIA BY THE JUPITER PRESS, MADRAS

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE NEW AGE

**You have the Word and we are waiting to,
hear it from you; India will speak through
your voice to the world, 'Hearken to me'.**

—Rabindranath Tagore.

By the same Author

THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA
SONGS FROM THE SOUL
MOTHER INDIA
INDIA'S MISSION IN THE WORLD

PREFACE

The articles collected in this book appeared in The Modern Review, The Hindusthan Review, The Calcutta Review, Prabuddha Bharat, Sunday Times, The Scholar, and The Indian Express. In writing these articles I have freely made extensive quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo with his kind permission. In pages five to eight the passages have been summarised from different parts of the Arya.

SRI AUROBINDO ASRAM,
PONDICHERRY.

ANILBARAN.

The 15th August, 1940

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THE IDEAL OF SRI AUROBINDO

WE are evidently passing through an age of transition and there is no end of speculation about the form which human society will take in the future. But the exact form of tomorrow can be revealed only tomorrow. It is the proper business of seers and thinkers to lay down the principles which will be the foundation of future society and to indicate the lines on which mankind must proceed towards their realisation. Sri Aurobindo saw these truths about the future of mankind in spiritual vision gained by Yoga and conducted the philosophical review, *Arya*, for seven years* to make them intelligible to the modern mind. But the time had not yet come when people could understand the true import of his new and profound message. So his wonderful vision and illuminating thoughts about the regeneration of mankind were confined only to a few readers and subscribers of the *Arya*; it seems

* 1914—1921

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that that time has come now, and people both in the West and in the East are taking a growing interest in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo. He has not founded a new sect or religion, but he has shown the path which mankind has to follow at this most critical moment in its history.

After the completion of the fourth year of the Arya, Sri Aurobindo thus wrote about its object: "Our idea was the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy which might be a contribution to the thought of the new age that is coming upon us. We start from the idea that humanity is moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race,—in all countries where men think, there is now in various forms that idea and that hope,—and our aim has been to search for the spiritual, religious and other truth which can enlighten and guide the race in this movement and endeavour. The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt could be based, were already present to us, otherwise we should have had no right to make the endeavour at all; but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found. This meant a continuous thinking, a high and subtle

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and difficult thinking on several lines, and this strain, which we had to impose on ourselves we are obliged to impose also on our readers.' (Arya, July, 1918).

There are many who still hold the view that spirituality and philosophy have nothing to do with actual life, and as Sri Aurobindo is pre-occupied with these things, no notice need be taken of him by persons who are engaged in active social and patriotic work, and that Sri Aurobindo can now be set aside as a back number or regarded as a figure of the past. 'But there is no greater error than to suppose, as the 'practical' man is wont to do, that thought is only a fine flower and ornament of life and that political, economic and personal interests are the important and effective motors of human action. We recognise that this is a world of life and action and developing organism; but the life that seeks to guide itself only by vital and material forces is a slow, dark and blundering growth. It is an attempt to approximate man to the method of vegetable and animal existence. The earth is a world of Life and Matter but man is not a vegetable, not an animal; he is a spiritual and thinking being who is set here to

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shape and use the animal mould for higher purposes, by higher motives with a more divine instrumentation."

Leaving apart ancient times, all the great movements of the modern age have been profoundly influenced by philosophical thinkers. The French Revolution, which gave to humanity its highest ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, was not brought about merely by the operation of political and economic causes, as Marxists would have us to believe, but it was chiefly a product of the teaching of Rousseau, Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists. After a long period of subjection and foreign rule, Italy was roused to a new life by the philosophical thoughts of Mazzini. Marxism itself is essentially a philosophy of life. The culture and manifestation of a tremendous brute force in Germany can be traced to Nietzsche's teaching of the superman. And the phenomenon of a great people falling to a most miserable condition through the neglect of worldly life that we are witnessing in India today has been due chiefly to the philosophical outlook of the Indians. That is why Sri Aurobindo gave so much importance to philosophy in the *Arya* which was indeed called a philosophical review.

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Those who say that spirituality is not a distinguishing feature of Indian civilisation, that before modern times all countries were equally religious, keep their eyes shut to actual and historical facts. There is indeed no place for argument here. Religion there is in every country, but the speciality of a culture arises from the emphasis that is given on the different aspects of life. The basis of Indian culture was laid in the Vedic age, and the Upanishads are the large crowning outcome of the Vedic discipline and experience. The time in which these Vedantic truths were seen and the Upanishads took shape was, as we can see from such records as the Chhandogya and the Brihadaranyaka, an epoch of immense and strenuous spiritual seeking in which the truths held by the initiates but kept back from ordinary men broke their barriers, swept through all the higher minds of the nation and fertilised the soil of Indian culture for a general growth of spirituality. It created the whole difference between the evolution of Indian and of other civilisations. The ordinary materialised souls, the external minds who are in India as elsewhere the majority, have at least this distinction that they are by centuries of training nearer to the

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inner realities, divided from them by a less thick veil of the universal ignorance and more easily led back to a vital glimpse of God and Spirit, Self and eternity. Where else could the lofty, austere and difficult teaching of Buddha have seized so rapidly on the popular mind or the songs of a Tukaram, a Kabir, the Sikh gurus, the chants of the Tamil saints with their fervid devotion but also their profound philosophy found so speedy an echo and formed a popular religious literature? This strong permeation, this readiness of the minds of a whole nation to turn to the highest realities, is the sign and fruit of an age-long, a real and a still living supremely spiritual culture.

The fundamental difference has been that Asia has served predominantly (not exclusively) as a field for man's spiritual experience and progression, Europe has been rather a workshop for his mental and vital activities. As the cycle of civilisation progressed, the Eastern continent has more and more converted itself into a store-house of spiritual energy sometimes active and reaching forward to new development, sometimes conservative and quiescent. Three or four times in history a stream of this energy has poured out upon

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Europe, but each time Europe has rejected wholly or partially the spiritual substance of the afflatus and used it rather as an impulse to fresh intellectual and material activity and progress. The first attempt was the filtering of Egyptian, Chaldean and Indian wisdom through the thought of the Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato and the neo-Platonists ; the result was the brilliantly intellectual and unspiritual civilisation of Greece and Rome. But it prepared the way for the second attempt when Buddhism and Vaishnavism, filtered through the Semitic temperament, entered Europe in the form of Christianity. Christianity came within an ace of spiritualising and even of asceticising the mind of Europe ; it was baffled by its own theological deformation in the minds of the Greek fathers of the Church and by the sudden flooding of Europe with a German barbarism whose temperament in its merits no less than in its defects was the very ante-type both of the Christian spirit and the Graeco-Roman intellect. The Islamic invasion of Spain and the southern coast of the Mediterannean may be regarded as a third attempt. The result of its meeting with Graecised Christianity was the re-awakening of the European mind in feudal and

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Catholic Europe and the obscure beginnings of modern thought and science. The fourth attempt which is as yet only in its slow initial stage is the quiet entry of Eastern and chiefly of Indian thought into Europe through the veil of German metaphysics.

The salvation of the human race lies in an integral development of the possibilities of mankind in the individual and in the community. The safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated knowledge and soulless organisation. The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement. It is not any exchange of forms that is required, but an interchange of regenerating impulses and a happy fusion and harmonising.

The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth

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of the Self, so that it shall re-embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and the psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity. This was the ideal and the search in the Arya, and it closed only when Sri Aurobindo had brought to a completion the development of his thought on all these lines. Sri Aurobindo stated his ideal in the following words: "Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument, so that man may develop his manhood into that true supermanhood which

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shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the Spirit."

Philosophy and spiritual thought must be the beginning and the foundation of any such attempt; for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things. The attempt to get rid of their supremacy must always be vain. At present the chief attack against admitting spirituality as an element in life is coming from socialists and communists of the Marxian type; they hold that religion, which has been in the past the main road leading towards spiritual truth, is a phase of capitalist society and is bound to disappear with the destruction of capitalism. But in fact there is no essential relation between capitalism and religion; capitalism is a recent phenomenon, while religion is as old as mankind. The slogan, Religion is the opiate of the people, can have reference only to its abuses. Religion, like all other good and noble things in life, has been grossly abused; but that is no final argument against its truth and validity. The history of Buddhist and other religious communes

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shows that religion is not essentially opposed even to communism; on the other hand, the Russian experiment of anti-religious communism does not seem to be very hopeful. Indeed, it has been confidently asserted that, if by nothing else, the failure of the Russian experiment is bound to come by its antagonism to such a fundamental fact of human nature as religion and spirituality. The scientific materialism on which Marx based his theory is no longer tenable, and only those can still hold to it who do not realise the significance of the revolution in modern scientific thought.

The one great defect of socialism* in general is that in the pursuit of equality, it has to suppress individual liberty, and society can progress

* In the *New World Order*, Mr. H. G. Wells predicts the end of *homo sapiens* if people in authority everywhere fail to manage the disruptive forces in our society. The disruptive forces are what the Marxians would call the technological advances, the *Yankee Clipper* and world wireless, the improvement in communications and machinery, which compel us to organise on a big scale or perish. Mr. Wells gives credit to the Bolsheviks for being the first to attempt the necessary adjustment. The objection to Soviet Collectivism, however, is "that lacking the antiseptic of legally assured personal freedom it will not keep." The most important reason for breakdown in Soviet Russia has

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only when the individuals of which it is composed have the fullest freedom of self-development and self-expression. But those who criticise socialism on this score cannot give any satisfactory reply how liberty is going to be reconciled with equality. As long as man is under the influence of egoism, as long as he feels himself to be separate from others, liberty is bound to lead to oppression, exploitation and inequality, because it is the rule of egoistic life to aggrandise itself at the expense of others. Only when man finds his true self to be the spirit in which he is essentially one with all other men and with God, there can be true fraternity, and on that basis there can be a true reconciliation of liberty and equality. For then every one will seek the happiness of others as much as of himself, and no one will feel himself to be perfect unless similar perfection is attained by his fellow beings.

been that those in control have been so obsessed with the task of preserving their own power that they have stamped out the free life that was essential for the success of their new organisation. Mr. Wells takes his stand on the possibility of combining Socialism and freedom. But when we come to the difficult question of the way in which individual freedom is to be preserved under Socialism, Mr. Wells is certainly vague.

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Sri Aurobindo thus wrote in the *Arya*: "Spirit being the fundamental truth of existence, life can be only its manifestation; Spirit must be not only the origin of life but its basis, its pervading reality and its highest and total result. But the forms of life as they appear to us are at once its disguises and its instruments of self-manifestation. Man has to grow in knowledge till they cease to be disguises and grow in spiritual power and quality till they become in him its perfect instruments. To grow into the fullness of the divine is the true law of human life, and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the *Arya*. This truth had to be worked out first of all from the metaphysical point of view; for in philosophy metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest, it is the statement of the last and most general truths on which all the others depend or in which they are gathered up. Therefore we gave the first place to the 'Life Divine'*. Here we start from the Vedantic position, its ideas of the Self and mind and life, of Sachchidananda and the world, of Knowledge and Ignorance."

* This has recently been published in book form.

rance, of rebirth and the Spirit. But Vedanta is popularly supposed to be a denial of life, and this is no doubt a dominant trend it has taken. Though starting from the original truth that all is the Brahman, the Self, it has insisted in the end that the world is simply not-Brahman, not-Self; it has ended in a paradox. We have attempted on the contrary to establish from its data a comprehensive Adwaita. We have shown that mind and life and matter are derivations from the Self through a spiritual mind or supermind, which is the real support of cosmic existence, and by developing mind into that man can arrive at the real truth of the spirit in the world and the real truth and highest law of life. The Self is Sachchidananda and there is no incurable antinomy between that and the world; only we see the world through the eyes of the Ignorance and we have to see it through the eyes of the Knowledge. Our ignorance itself is only knowledge developing out of its involution in the apparent nescience of Matter and on its way to return to its conscious integrality. To accomplish that return and manifest the spiritual life in the human existence is the opportunity given by the successions of rebirth. We accept

the truth of evolution, not so much in the physical form given to it by the West as in its philosophical truth, the involution of life and mind and spirit here in matter and their progressive manifestation. At the summit of this evolution is the spiritual life, the life divine.

“It was necessary to show that these truths were not inconsistent with the old Vedantic truth, therefore we included explanations from this point of view of the Veda, two of the Upanishads and the Gita. The Gita* we are treating as a powerful application of truth of spirit to the largest and most difficult part of the truth of life, to action, and a way by which action can lead us to birth into the Spirit and can be harmonised with the spiritual life. Truth of philosophy is of a merely theoretical value unless it can be lived, and we have therefore tried in the *Synthesis of Yoga* to arrive at a synthetical view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual self-discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence. But this is

* The *Essays on the Gita* is published in book form, and *The Psychology of Social Development* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* will soon be published.

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an individual self-development, and therefore it was necessary to show too how our ideal can work out in the social life of mankind. In the "Psychology of Social Development", we have indicated how these truths affect the evolution of human society. In the "Ideal of Human Unity", we have taken the present trend of mankind towards a closer unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting to them in order that real human unity may be achieved." (Arya, July, 1918)

Subsequent events have amply proved the validity of the main contentions advanced by Sri Aurobindo in the pages of the Arya. About the proposed League of Nations he then remarked:

"Various ideas have been put forward with more or less authority as to the necessary conditions of international peace. The crudest of these is the foolish notion created by a one-sided propaganda, which imagines that the destruction of German militarism is the one thing needful and in itself sufficient to secure the future peace of the world So long as any kind of militarism survives, so long as fields of political and commercial aggrandisement are there and so long as national egoisms live and are held sacred and there is no

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final check on their inherent instinct of expansion, war will be always a possibility, and almost a necessity of the life of the human peoples. Another idea put forward with great authority behind it is a league of free and democratic nations which will keep the peace by pressure or by the use of force if needs be. If less crude, the solution is not for that any more satisfactory than the other. It is an old idea, the idea Metternich put in practice after the overthrow of Napoleon; only in place of a dynastic Holy Alliance of monarchs to maintain peace and monarchical order and keep down democracy, it is proposed to have a league of free—and imperial—peoples to enforce democracy and to maintain peace. One thing is perfectly sure that the new league would go the way of the old; it would break up as soon as the interests and ambitions of the constituent powers became sufficiently disunited.” “The unity of the human race by political and administrative means implies eventually the formation and organisation of a single World-State out of a newly created, though still loose, natural organic unity of mankind. For the natural organic unity already exists, a unity of life, of involuntary association, of a closely interdependent

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existence of the constituent parts in which the life and movements of one affect the life of the others in a way which would have been impossible a hundred years ago. Continent has no longer a separate life from continent; no nation can any longer isolate itself at will and live a separate existence. Science, commerce, and rapid communications have produced a state of things in which the disparate masses of humanity, once living to themselves, have been drawn together by a process of subtle unification into a single mass which has already a common vital and is rapidly forming a common mental existence." "The idea of a World-State or world union has been born not only in the speculative, forecasting mind of the thinker, but in the consciousness of humanity out of the very necessity of this new common existence. The World-State must now either be brought about by a mutual understanding or by the force of circumstances and a series of new and disastrous shocks. For the old still functioning order of things was founded on circumstances and conditions which no longer exist. A new order is demanded by the new conditions and, so long as it is not created, there will be a transitional

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era of continued trouble or recurrent disorders, inevitable crises through which Nature will effect in her own violent way the working out of the necessity which she has evolved. There may be in the process a maximum of loss and suffering through the clash of national and imperial egoisms or else a minimum if reason and good-will may prevail."

The conclusion at which Sri Aurobindo arrives is that, while it is possible to construct a precarious and quite mechanical unity by political and administrative means, the unity of the human race, even if achieved, can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualises itself and becomes the general inner law of human life. "The religion of humanity was mind-born in the eighteenth century, the *manasa putra* of the rationalist thinkers who brought it forward as a substitute for the formal spiritualism of ecclesiastical Christianity. It tried to give itself a body in Positivism, which was an attempt to formulate the dogmas of this religion, but on too heavily and severely rationalistic a basis for acceptance even by an Age of Reason. Humanitarianism has been its most prominent emotional

result. Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expression of good works. Democracy, socialism, pacifism are to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence.

"The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of the human spirit. No other idol, neither the nation, the State, the family nor anything else ought to take its place; they are only worthy of respect so far as they are images of the human spirit and enshrine its presence and aid its self-manifestation. But where the cult of these idols seeks to usurp the place of the spirit and makes demands inconsistent with its service, they should be put aside. No injunctions of old creeds, religious, political, social or cultural, are valid when they go against its claims. Science even, though it is one of the chief modern idols, must not be allowed to make claims contrary to its ethical temperament and aim, for science is only valuable in so far as it helps and serves by knowledge and progress the religion of humanity. War, capital punishment, the taking

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of human life, cruelty of all kinds whether committed by the individual, the State or society, not only physical cruelty, but moral cruelty, the degradation of any human being or any class of human beings under whatever specious plea or in whatever interest, the oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class, of nation by nation and all those habits of life and institutions of society of a similar kind which religion and ethics formerly tolerated or even favoured in practice, whatever they might do in their ideal rule or creed, are crimes against the religion of humanity, abominable to its ethical mind, forbidden by its primary tenets, to be fought against always, in no degree to be tolerated. Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, fortified by science against disease and preventible death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened ennobled, uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violation from suppression, from mechanisation, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be

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rescued from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organised in the play of its powers for the service of humanity. And all this too is not to be held as an abstract or pious sentiment, but given full and practical recognition in the persons of men and nations and mankind. This, speaking largely, is the idea and spirit of the intellectual religion of humanity.

“One has only to compare human life and thought and feeling a century or two ago with human life, thought and feeling in the pre-war period to see how great an influence this religion of humanity has exercised and how fruitful a work it has done. But still, in order to accomplish all its future, this idea and religion of humanity has to make itself more explicit, insistent and categorically imperative. For otherwise it can only work with clarity in the minds of the few, and with the mass it will be only a modifying influence, but will not be the rule of human life. And so long as that is so, it cannot entirely prevail over its own principal enemy. That enemy, the enemy of all real religion, is human egoism, the egoism of the individual, the

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egoism of class and nation. These it could for a time soften, modify, force to curb their more arrogant, open and brutal expressions, oblige to adopt better institutions, but not give place to the love of mankind, not to recognise a real unity between man and man. For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity, as it must be the earthly aim of all human religion, love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life, the ideal which was expressed first some thousands of years ago in the ancient Vedic hymn and must always remain the highest injunction of the Spirit within us to human life upon earth. Till that is brought about, the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished. With that done, the one necessary psychological change will have been effected without which no formal and mechanical, no political and administrative unity can be real and secure. If it is done, that outward unification may not even be indispensable or, if indispensable, it will come about naturally, not as now it seems likely to be, by catastrophic means, but by the demand of the human mind, and will be held secure by an

essential need of our perfected and developed human nature." (*The Ideal of Human Unity*)

Sri Aurobindo went thoroughly into the question of international unification by political and administrative means and considered the various possibilities pointing out the deeper currents which really determine the movement of the race and illustrating his views with examples drawn from the history of the world in a manner which makes his book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, a unique creation in the world's political literature. All his predictions have been fully justified by subsequent events and developments. "A federal system," so he sums up, "would tend inevitably to establish one general type for human life, institutions and activities; it could allow only a play of minor variations. But the need of variation in living Nature could not always rest satisfied with that scanty sustenance. On the other hand, a looser confederacy might well be open to the objection that it would give too ready a handle for centrifugal forces, were such to arise in new strength. A loose confederation could not be permanent, it must turn in one direction or the other, end either in a close and rigid centralisation or a break-

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up of its loose unity into its original elements.

“The saving power needed is a new psychological factor which will at once make a united life necessary to humanity and force it to respect the principle of freedom. The religion of humanity seems to be the one growing force which tends in that direction; for it makes for the sense of human oneness, it has the idea of the race, and yet at the same time it respects the human individual and the natural human grouping. But its present intellectual form seems hardly sufficient A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in

which we are all one; that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation, but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. To go into all that this implies would be too large a subject to be entered upon here; it is enough to point out that in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an

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idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

“Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,—perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions

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are all temporary and disappointing,—the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection." (*The Ideal of Human Unity*)

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

I

BERGSON AND SRI AUROBINDO

WHILE the Vice-Chancellor of another Indian University is warning all learned men against Vedantism, Vivekanandism and spirituality in general, the Calcutta University has had the temerity to bring out a book on Sri Aurobindo written by one of its own Professors. When Lord Ronaldshay was the Governor of Bengal, he expressed great surprise that so much importance was given to Western philosophy in the Indian Universities, and so little to Indian philosophy. As a matter of fact, in all the Indian universities our education is planned on Western model (specially of London and Oxford type), and inspiration in philosophy is still being sought from the pages of Hegel and Bradley, rather than

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from anything Indian. At long last, the premier University in India seems to be taking the lead in correcting this gross anomaly. It is already several years that the Calcutta University introduced the Gita into the Intermediate course; it is now turning attention to the study of modern spiritual thought and practice in India.

Professor Adharchandra Das, a very brilliant graduate of the Calcutta University, was attracted by the personality of Sri Aurobindo to make a serious study of his writings, and his book, *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Mankind*, has certainly high merit as an intellectual presentation of the teaching of Sri Aurobindo. If I call attention to certain gaps in the presentation, it is not to diminish its merit, but to fill in the incompletenesses of a picture which could not be altogether flawless in the absence of a close acquaintance with the inner modes and sources of Sri Aurobindo's thinking. A criticism from the point of view of intellectual reasoning and founded on the ideation of Western philosophy could hardly avoid missing some fundamentals; for Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not founded on intellectual ratiocination but on Yogic illumination and experience. Thus the use of the word "intuition"

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by Sri Aurobindo has led Mr. Das to place him in the same category with Bergson. "It is nothing new to read," says Mr. Das, "that it is only intuition which is capable of knowledge by identity." What he has quoted in this connection from the *Arya* is from Sri Aurobindo's account of the methods of Vedantic knowledge, and the Vedanta is at least two thousand years older than Bergson. What is new in Sri Aurobindo is this that he has interpreted the Vedanta in the light of his own spiritual experience and has presented it in the terms of modern thought. Mr. Das is not correct in saying that, when Sri Aurobindo wrote these things in the *Arya*, he was a philosopher, and that only now he has become a Yogi. Sri Aurobindo had far advanced in Yoga when he undertook the publication of the *Arya* in 1914 in order to make intelligible to the modern mind a little of the knowledge he had acquired by the highest spiritual experience. The contribution of philosophers like Bergson is this that in an age of the apotheosis of reason, they have boldly proclaimed that there is a higher faculty of knowledge, namely, intuition. But Mr. Das is mistaken in thinking that Sri Aurobindo, like Bergson, regards intuition as

the highest source of knowledge. "Intuition," says Sri Aurobindo, "is the secondary action of the supramental power in the lower hemisphere of mind, life and body." (*Arya*, V—265). The knowledge by identity which is the supreme knowledge can be had only when one rises above the mind; intuition is but a reflection of that knowledge in the mind; and the mind subtly modifies what is received from above, so that the reflection seldom remains precise and pure. It is for this reason that though intuition gives us much knowledge in flashes which we cannot have otherwise, this mental intuitive knowledge mixed and diminished in its native power of certitude has to be amplified and tested by logical reasoning; but that test is not applicable to the pure action of intuition. Sri Aurobindo has given the fullest value both to intuition and reason; and so long as we are on the mental level, we have to make a judicious use of both of them. "Science," says Sri Aurobindo, "could not move a step without faith and intuition and today it is growing full of dreams. Religion could not stand for a moment if it did not support itself by the intellectual presentation, however inadequate, of profound truths." (*Arya*, I—56).

Mr. Das does not seem to be very clear himself about the distinction between reason and intuition. By an analysis of the Aristotelian syllogism, he has tried to show that all reasoning is essentially intuitive. In other places he says that reason is higher than intuition; he regards reason as the "innermost essence of our being," and describes intuition as the "fringe and penumbra" of reason. He cannot conceive how the Upanishadic seers could have arrived at knowledge without logical reasoning, although, as every mystic or Yogin knows, direct knowledge begins where reasoning mind falls silent. He seems to have in his mind the stock Western criticism of mystic experience that it has no objective validity. But the fact is that the true mystic can not only show to others the way of arriving at the experience which he himself has had, but he has the power to communicate his experience to others; thus there is no fear that once we enter the region of mysticism, "all objectivity dwindles away, and subjectivity reigns supreme." If two persons cannot agree whether a particular tree they have seen is in flower or not, they cannot decide it by any amount of logical reasoning; they have only to go to the spot again and have

a better view of the tree. Intuitive knowledge is of the nature of such direct seeing: so "the less perfect intuition must be corrected by a more perfect, but logical reasoning cannot be its judge." The subject of intuition has been dealt with by Sri Aurobindo with a fullness which is found nowhere else, and we cannot do better than quote at length some passages from the *Arya* itself in order to make his meaning clear.

"It is difficult for the intellect to grasp at all what is meant by these supramental distinctions: the mental terms in which they can be rendered are lacking or inadequate and they can only be understood after a certain sight or certain approximations in experience. A number of indications are all that at present it can be useful to give. And first it will be enough to take certain clues from the thinking mind; for it is there that some of the nearest keys to the supramental action are discoverable. The thought of the intuitive mind proceeds wholly by four powers that shape the form of the truth, an intuition that suggests its idea, an intuition that discriminates, an inspiration that brings in its word and something of its greater substance, and a revelation that shapes to the sight its very face and

body of reality. These things are not the same as certain movements of the ordinary mental intelligence that look analogous and are easily mistaken for the true intuition in our first experience. The suggestive intuition is not the same thing as the intellectual insight of a quick intelligence or the intuitive discrimination as the rapid judgment of the reasoning intellect; the intuitive inspiration is not the same as the inspired action of the imaginative intelligence, nor the intuitive revelation as the strong light of a purely mental close seizing and experience.

"It would perhaps be accurate to say that these latter activities are mental representations of the higher movements, attempts of the ordinary mind to do the same things or the best possible imitations the intellect can offer of the functionings of the higher nature. The true intuitions differ from these effective but insufficient counterfeits in their substance of light, their operation, their method of knowledge. The intellectual rapidities are dependent on awakenings of the basic mental ignorance to mental figures and representations of truth that may be quite valid in their own field and for their own purpose but are not necessarily and by their very

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nature reliable. They are dependent for their emergence on the suggestions given by mental and sense data or on the accumulation of past mental knowledge. They search for the truth as a thing outside, an object to be found and looked at and stored as an acquisition and, when found, scrutinise its surfaces, suggestions or aspects. This scrutiny can never give a quite complete and adequate truth idea. However positive they may seem at the time, they may at any moment have to be passed over, rejected and found inconsistent with fresh knowledge.

“The intuitive knowledge on the contrary, however limited it may be in its field or application, is within that scope sure with an immediate, a durable and especially a self-existent certitude. It may take for starting-point or rather for a thing to light up and disclose in its true sense the data of mind and sense or else fire a train of past thought and knowledge to new meanings and issues, but it is dependent on nothing but itself and may leap out of its own field of lustres, independent of previous suggestion or data, and this kind of action becomes progressively more common and adds itself to the other to initiate new depths and ranges

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of knowledge. In either case there is always an element of self-existent truth and a sense of absoluteness of origination suggestive of its proceeding from the spirit's knowledge by identity. It is the disclosing of a knowledge that is secret but already existent in the being; it is not an acquisition, but something that was always there and revealable. It sees the truth from within and illumines with that inner vision the outsides and it harmonises, too, readily—provided we keep intuitively awake—with whatever fresh truth has yet to arrive. These characteristics become more pronounced and intense in the higher, the proper supramental ranges: in the intuitive mind they may not be always recognisable in their purity and completeness, because of the mixture of mental stuff and its accretion, but in the divine reason and greater supramental action they become free and absolute." (*Arya*, VII—4)

Bergson has no knowledge of the supermind, and he finds in intuition the greatest faculty of knowledge which alone can arrive at metaphysical truth; but he also realises its limitations. He finds that man has developed intelligence, so in man intuition is feeble and discontinuous while in animals it is continuous and all-pervasive. He

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holds that in the last resort intuition by itself is not sufficient to give us metaphysical truth, but that it must first absorb intelligence. "A complete and perfect humanity," says Bergson, "would be that in which the two forms of conscious activity should attain their full development." But by what practical steps of self-discipline can we arrive at this consummation? On this point Bergson like other Western philosophers is mute. If in the course of evolution intuition has become feeble and discontinuous in man, "presumably, therefore," so says a critic of Bergson, "as evolution proceeds the residue will diminish to a vanishing point." Sri Aurobindo has seen that in order to perfect humanity, we must go beyond both reason and intuition to their source in the supermind, and that the practical process by which this is to be achieved is integral Yoga. What then is the nature of this transition from mind to supermind, from imperfect to perfect humanity?

"The transition from mind to supermind," says Sri Aurobindo, "is not only the substitution of a greater instrument of thought and knowledge, but a change and conversion of the whole consciousness. There is evolved not only a supra-

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mental thought, but a supramental will, sense, feeling, a supramental substitute for all the activities that are now accomplished by the mind. All these higher activities are first manifested in the mind itself as descents, irruptions, messages or revelations of a superior power. Mostly they are mixed up with the more ordinary action of the mind and not easily distinguishable from them in our first inexperience except by their superior light and force and joy, the more so as the mind heightened or excited by their frequent coming quickens its own action and imitates the external characteristics of the supramental activity; its own operation is made more swift, luminous, strong and positive and it arrives even at a kind of imitative and often false intuition that strives to be but is not really the luminous, direct and self-existent truth. The next step is the formation of a luminous mind of intuitive experience, thought, will, feeling, sense from which the intermixture of the lesser mind and the imitative intuition are progressively eliminated: this is a process of purification, *shuddhi*, necessary to the new formation and perfection, *siddhi*. At the same time there is the disclosure above the mind of the source of the intuitive action and a more

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and more organised functioning of a true supramental consciousness acting not in the mind but on its own higher plane. This draws up into itself in the end the intuitive mentality it has created as its representative and assumes the charge of the whole activity of the consciousness. The process is progressive and for a long time chequered by admixture and the necessity of a return upon the lower movements in order to correct and transform them. The higher and the lower power act sometimes alternately,—the consciousness descending back from the heights it had attained to its former level but always with some change,—but sometimes together and with a sort of mutual reference. The mind eventually becomes wholly intuitivised and exists only as a passive channel for the supramental action; but this condition too is not ideal and presents, besides, still a certain obstacle, because the higher action has still to pass through a retarding and diminishing conscious substance,—that of the physical consciousness. The final stage of the change will come when the supermind occupies and supramentalises the whole being and turns even the vital and physical sheaths into moulds of itself, responsive, subtle and instinct with its

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powers. Man then becomes wholly the super-man." (*Arya*, VII—65-66)

II

THE MEANING OF EVOLUTION

How is it that intuition has a better activity in animals than in man? Man, the mental being, is certainly nearer to the supermind than animals which are still involved in the vital and nervous being. According to Bergson, animals possess in full measure that intuition which is the sovereign guide to truth, while man has it but feebly and discontinuously. It is not very clear in what sense Bergson asserts the superiority of man. Sri Aurobindo has made the point quite clear. The instinct in animals operates for action and not for knowledge as in man. Bergson also seems to mean the same thing when he says that intuition is instinct conscious of itself, that instinct becomes so conscious through an admixture of intelligence. It is this admixture with intelligence which makes intuition so "feeble" in man. Animals act instinctively without understanding what they are doing; a particular stimulus—internal or external—goads them to act in a particular manner and

that contributes to the preservation or propagation of the species. But of this adaptation of means to end, the animal itself is not conscious. Only man has eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree; he cogitates about the means and the end and thus falters at every step instead of going directly to the action like animals. But whence comes this adaptation of means to end which is seen in the operation of instincts in animals? That is a sign of intelligence which must lie somewhere. Here we come to a cornerstone of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which Mr. Das does not seem to have fully grasped. The supreme consciousness is not only above us, but it is also below us and works from there. The supreme consciousness with supermind latent in it is concealed not only in man, but also in the animal and the plant, nay even in the material atom; and it is pressing from there to manifest itself, to come to the front, and this is the true cause of the evolutionary process, the *élan vital* of Bergson.

The instinct or vital intuition in animals is nothing but a veiled action of that supreme consciousness. As the veil becomes thinner and thinner, the creature rises from animal to man,

and from man to superman. In the intermediate stage between animal and superman intellectual reason comes as a sort of mediator, so that animal instinct may become fully "conscious of itself," to use the words of Bergson. But Mr. Das is wholly mistaken when he says, "What Aurobindo has in his mind when he speaks of consciousness as working in plants etc. is the superconscient." Behind and above all this world play there is the supreme consciousness no doubt, but for its own purpose that consciousness withdraws its full power from certain points, and conceals itself; thus we get all the grades of the inconscient, the subconscient, the conscient, and the superconscient. "In each of these, plant, animal, man, god, the Eternal is there containing and repressing himself as it were in order to make a certain statement of his being. Each is the whole Eternal concealed." (*Arya*, III—711). "Evolution means always a progressive development of that which is in seed and a manifestation of that which is phenomenally hidden." Sri Aurobindo speaks of the evolutionary process as "an operation of creative force which moves between two poles of consciousness. On one side there is a secret cons-

consciousness within and above which contains in it all potentialities—there eternally manifest, here awaiting delivery—of light, peace, power, and bliss. On the other side there is another outward on the surface and below that starts from the apparent opposite of unconsciousness, inertia, blind stress, possibility of suffering and grows by receiving into itself higher and higher powers which make it always recreate its manifestation in larger terms, each new-creation of this kind bringing out something of the inner potentiality, making it more and more possible to bring down the Perfection that waits above." (*The Riddle of this World*, P. 107)

Mr. Das regards it as gross anthropomorphism to attribute consciousness to plants. He says, "We know in our case what consciousness is. And when in the seekings and shrinkings of plants we read the workings of consciousness, we are merely extending our self-knowledge to the plant world." But that is a quite wrong account of how Sri Aurobindo finds consciousness in plants and of what he finds, and it shows that Mr. Das has not clearly grasped the nature of intuition and knowledge by identity. It is not by an inference or reading from our own

consciousness, but by identification with the plant that we can directly know that it has a consciousness. Sir J. C. Bose also felt the conscious life in the plant by a sort of identification with it; then he devised instruments to show signs of that conscious activity to our crude sense. Spiritual experience needs no buttressing from science; but there can be no objection to pointing out any unity or correspondence. Mr. Das is obviously labouring under the Western idea that science, philosophy and religion cannot be harmonised with each other; but in India they always formed a happy family, having different and well-marked fields of activity, but always in amity and harmony with each other.

Mr. Das has every right to hold that consciousness was absent in matter and plants, and that it suddenly appeared in animals; but that is not the view of Sri Aurobindo. "In what seems to us the sleep or insensibility of matter and inconscient force," says Sri Aurobindo, "there is a consciousness which we shall find to be essentially the same in all, but which differs in its action, its pitch and organisation." "We have these two universal powers, life and matter. And as we have seen that matter is form of

being, a sign and effect of the power of spirit, so we see life to be a universal action of being an operation of the power of spirit; for it is a force, but a force which is informed always with consciousness even when that consciousness appears to be involved and forgetful of itself in the absorption of its mere activity." But while the essential consciousness is the same in man, animal and plant, the operation and special character of it is different in each; the plant consciousness is not human, mental-anthropomorphic; it has the signs and limits proper to its evolutionary stage.

Evolution means always a progressive development of that which is in seed and a manifestation of that which is phenomenally hidden. But as we are potentially the Divine, we have also the eternally realised Divine within us, who is guiding our life at every step from behind the veil and helping us to realise our potentiality. We hasten this process of self-manifestation by surrendering ourselves integrally to this inner Guide, Friend and Lord. "This," says the Mandukya Upanishad, "is omniscient, omnipotent, the inner control, the womb of all and that from which creatures are born and into

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which they depart." We find the same idea of this inner control repeated in the Gita; for it is the Lord who "sits in the hearts of all creatures and turns all creatures mounted on an engine by his Maya."

Sri Aurobindo's account of evolution is in full accord with the latest discoveries of Science, as well as with the latest philosophies based on that scientific knowledge; but he goes far beyond them and brings out their fullest significance. J. S. Haldane says in his recent book, *The Philosophical Basis of Biology*: "Philosophy leads us not to the conception of a perfect God existing apart from what is very clearly an imperfect universe but of a continuously living and acting God manifested in progressive creation of what we recognise as higher." This is in accord with the Greek saying, "God is not but becomes," and this is the central tenet of the early twentieth century philosophies in the West, of Bergson, Alexander and the Neo-Idealists, Croce and Gentile; they all represent God as realising himself in the historical process of man's development. This is also Sri Aurobindo's view, but he says in addition that, at the same time, God is eternally realised, that God is immanent in the universe,

He is also transcendent. There is already a reaction in the West against the immanentist theory. Since the war, and increasingly in the last ten years, men have returned to the idea of God the Supreme, the Awful, the Absolute. "Mankind," observes an English writer, "perplexed by the failure of science to render life better, has lost that self-confidence, and turned once more to the adoration of the Transcendent God, God the Incomprehensible, the God who cannot be confined by any scheme or statement of ours." Nowhere these different aspects of Reality, the Transcendent, the Universal and the Individual, have been brought out more clearly and synthetised as it has been done in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo.

According to the modern theory of evolution, it is proceeding by an immanent urge; but that is only a half-truth. Forces are pressing down from above so that all the possibilities latent in the world may come to full manifestation, and behind this process is the all-seeing, all-guiding, all-powerful hand of the Supreme who is in the world, within us and above all worlds at the same time. Sri Aurobindo speaks of different planes of existence, material, vital,

mental, supramental, acting and reacting upon one another. The higher planes are pressing upon the material to create there some formations of their own; that is how life emerges out of matter, mind out of life. This is spiritual evolution as Sri Aurobindo sees it. "If we regard the gradation of worlds or planes as a whole, we see them as a great connected complex movement; the higher precipitate their influences on the lower, the lower react to the higher and develop or manifest in themselves within their own formula something that corresponds to the superior power and its action. The material world has evolved life in obedience to a pressure from the vital plane, mind in obedience to a pressure from the mental plane. It is now trying to evolve supermind in obedience to a pressure from the supramental plane." (*The Riddle of this World*, p. 10)

III

THE IDEAL OF THE SUPERMAN

The working of the intuitive faculty in Bergson, on his own admission, is mixed up with the working of the intelligence; as a consequence, he also has cut up Reality and seen, though very vividly, only the Heraclitean aspect

of becoming and change. The opposite extreme is represented in our country by Shankaracharya who intuited behind all change and becoming the silent, immutable, inactive, eternal Self, in comparison with which the world-play appeared to him to be only an illusion of the mind. If the philosophy of Bergson is the "vivid expression of the tumultuous life of the Western people," the philosophy of Shankara represents, and has in a sense paved the way for, the lifelessness and despondence of the Indian people for centuries. The ancient Vedic seers of India had a more integral vision and saw the ultimate Reality to be both being and becoming, active and inactive, mutable and immutable, *nirguno guni*. The Gita, summing up the whole Aryan spiritual culture, developed the great concept of the Purushottama, the Supreme Being, who contains both the Kshara and the Akshara, the mutable and the immutable, as two aspects, and yet transcends both of these. Liberation according to the Gita does not consist in Nirvana or the extinction of the individual self in the Absolute, but a dwelling in and an attainment of *sadharmya*, likeness of nature with the Supreme Divine, the Purushottama. The Gita however does not fully

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explain this ideal of *sadharmya*, but leaves it as a supreme secret, *uttamam rahasyam*, to be realised by the sadhaks themselves in their lives. The immediate object of the Gita was to check the tendency towards renunciation of life and work, which had begun to threaten the ancient balance and harmony of Indian culture; and it emphatically preached that one could attain the supreme status by living and acting in the world consecrating all life and action to the Divine. The Gita "proposes an integral dynamic activity founded on a still passivity; a largest possible action irrevocably based on an immobile calm is its secret,—free expression out of a supreme inward silence." This teaching of the Gita, "which could not prevail in India against the tremendous tide of Buddhism, was lost afterwards in the intensity of ascetic illusionism and the fervour of world-shunning saints and devotees."

We find the Gita's ideal of *sadharmya*, the putting on of the Divine nature, reiterated in the mysterious saying of Jesus, "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect"; we find its reflection, however inadequate, in the superman of Nietzsche and the deity of Alexander. But the full implications of the teaching of the Gita have

been brought out and developed in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga where man is to rise to the life divine through the practice of integral self-surrender to the Supreme Divine. By apt quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, Mr. Das has shown how Sri Aurobindo's ideal differs from that of Nietzsche and Alexander. Nietzsche was an apostle who never entirely understood his own message. His negative description of the superman is very vivid and forceful. He would not accept great men like Napoleon, Lenin or Gandhi as superman. "Never yet hath there been a superman," says Nietzsche, "Naked have I seen both of them, the greatest man and the smallest man: all-too-similar are they still to each other. Verily, even the greatest found I—all-too-human." What then is this superman before whom even the greatest amongst men would be "all-too-human", "all-too-small"?

Thus spoke Nietzsche through the allegorical figure Zarathustra:—"I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man? All beings have created something beyond themselves: and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man?"

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"Ye have made your way from the worm to man, and much within you is still worm. Once were ye apes, and even yet man is more of an ape than any of the apes.

"Even the wisest among you is only a disharmony and hybrid of plant and phantom. But do I bid you become phantom and plants?

"Lo, I teach you the Superman.

"The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman shall be the meaning of the earth. Upward goes our way from species to super-species."

Nietzsche bids men to sacrifice everything, to stake their all so that the superman may appear on the earth. In all this, "he spoke out the word as he had heard it, the truth as he had seen it, bare, luminous, impersonal, and therefore flawless and imperishable." But coming to a positive description of the superman, he stumbles: his prophetic mind is clouded by his European inheritance and environment and his revolt against the Christ-idea. He conceived the superman to be the embodiment of power, and regarded *will to power* as the means of its realisation. Starting from this conception, he made a new valuation of moral ideas and said, "Good is all that enhances the

feeling of power, the will to Power and power itself. Evil is all that proceeds from weakness." He regarded pity, compassion, fellow-feeling as weakness to be discarded relentlessly. Certainly power is a divine attribute and as such will be found in the superman in the highest degree. But so also is compassion. "There is a divine compassion which descends to us from on high and for the man whose nature does not possess it, is not cast in its mould, to pretend to be the superior man, the master man or the superman is a folly and an insolence, for he alone is the superman who manifests the highest nature of the Godhead in humanity." (*Essays on the Gita*). Nietzsche's superman corresponds to the Asura in Indian terminology, a personification of exaggerated egoism. Nietzsche himself suspected this, "Ye would call my Superman a devil?" Sri Aurobindo's superman, as Mr. Das aptly puts it, "is no Titan but a human Godhead."

Still Mr. Das concludes his book by observing that "the ideal Aurobindo adumbrates is in a sense ethereal and abstract." The supermind is much more substantial and concrete than the mind, life and body which are indeed derived from it and are its lower formations. But only the super-

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mind can know the supermind wholly; to the unillumined mind it may appear as ethereal and abstract. "Thou alone, O Purushottama," cries Arjuna in the Gita, "knowest thyself by thyself," *atmana atmanam vettha*. "This is a knowledge that comes by spiritual identity and the unaided heart, will, intelligence of the natural man cannot arrive at it by their own motion and can only get at imperfect mental reflections that reveal less than they conceal and disfigure. This is a secret wisdom which one must hear from the seers who have seen the face of this Truth, have heard and have become one with it in self and spirit." Sri Aurobindo has not made the impossible attempt to give a complete presentation of the whole character of the supermind; all he has done is to present some salient characters from the point of view of the actual process of the conversion in the Yoga. And that is sufficient to rouse the right aspiration in our heart and support our faith provided we are sufficiently open to receive his teaching.

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the future of mankind does not consist, as Mr. Das supposes, merely in provoking thought and stimulating imagination. When we say that Sri Aurobindo is a scholar

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of vast erudition, a poet of the very highest altitude, a pioneer and prophet of Indian Nationalism, a savant representing "the completest synthesis that has been realised to this day, of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe," nay, when we say that he is a Yogin, a mystic, an apostle, we are still in the periphery of his personality and do not touch the core. Romain Rolland gave a more intimate account of Sri Aurobindo when he described him as "the last of the great Rishis" who "holds in his hand, in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of creative energy." Sri Aurobindo is above all a creator. He does not merely preach the Superman like Nietzsche, but he has undertaken the great work of creating the Superman. "Failure in such a field matters little," says Sri Aurobindo, "for the mere attempt is dynamic and creative." The sceptic mind of Mr. Das interprets this as a misgiving on the part of Sri Aurobindo, whereas it is only intended to emphasise the dynamic and creative nature of the pursuit in which he is engaged. Sri Aurobindo has not kept his teaching and ideal as a sealed book; it is open to all who care to read. But preaching and propaganda do not form a part of his work. He wants to complete in silence the task to which he has been

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called. That is the reason of his complete retirement from all external activities to which ordinarily so much importance is given. Man cannot exceed himself and become superman by his own effort, just as an ape could not have turned itself into a man. A pressure from the vital plane was necessary to produce the phenomena of life; similarly, a descent from the mental plane was necessary to evolve the animal and lastly the man; a similar descent from the supramental plane is needed so that man may turn into superman. As a seer and a prophet, Sri Aurobindo has seen that the great hour for that manifestation has arrived; he has also seen how man can prepare himself to receive that Truth and undergo that transformation. But Sri Aurobindo does not rest contented with that knowledge, he has proceeded to prepare the conditions under which the Supramental Principle can manifest itself in the life of humanity. Once the Supramental Principle is established on the earth, even as a seed or nucleus, his work for the future of mankind will be accomplished or rather its accomplishment will have begun.

MODERN SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

I

MATERIALISM AND SCIENCE

MODERN science has cut away the basis from a purely materialistic view of the world. It is not that hitherto Science, even in the West, has always been materialistic. The perception of law and order in the universe, which is the beginning of Science, has always been regarded as evidence of the existence of a conscious being as the source and master of the world. Referring to very ancient times, Plato writes in his *Laws* that even at that time "some ventured to hazard the conjecture that mind was the orderer of the universe." He himself argues that if the sun and the stars "had been things without soul, and had no mind, they could never have moved with numerical exactness so wonderful." We find that even Kepler and Newton had been greatly influenced by their theological ideas. Still Science as such tended more and more towards a materialistic

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view until it produced a mentality which has become the basis of modern civilisation and culture.

Materialism as a metaphysical doctrine holds that matter is the ultimate reality and that mind and consciousness are derived from matter; as the liver secretes bile so the brain secretes thought. This view is against all religion and spirituality, which assert that an infinite conscious being is the ultimate reality of which the material world is a creation or manifestation. The investigations of Science supported materialism chiefly in two ways. Science regarded the world in a frame-work of space and time. At the beginning of his *Principia*, Newton proclaims absolute space and time as the entities that are at the bottom of all laws of nature. Thus spatial extension was regarded as a fundamental attribute of reality. But as consciousness does not occupy space like matter, it was regarded as less real. Another way in which Science gave support to materialism was its adherence through centuries to a strictly deterministic position. Determinism implies that the state of the world at one moment defines by strict mathematical laws its course during all past and future time. Whatever happens happens by

inexorable natural laws. When Napoleon asked Laplace what was the place of God in the universe, the latter replied that he saw no such place. Curiously enough, this position has found favour with dogmatic Christianity. The world cannot be changed now, but at the beginning God could have set up the natural order in innumerable ways. He chose the present one to suit his purpose. In this way Descartes reconciled mechanical necessity with Divine Predestination. But this position is not logically tenable. If Nature and her laws can explain everything, why presuppose a God in addition? So God became an unnecessary and discarded hypothesis.

This was the position up to the close of the nineteenth century. But two great scientific discoveries, with one of which the present century was ushered in, have entirely changed the outlook of Science. When we interpret natural phenomena in the light of the theory of relativity, we find that "space means nothing apart from our perception of objects, and time means nothing apart from our experience of events. Space begins to appear merely as a fiction created by our minds, an illegitimate extension to nature of a subjective concept which helps us to understand

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and describe the arrangements of objects as seen by us, while time appears as a second fiction serving a similar purpose for the arrangement of events which happen to us." *The New Background of Science*, by Sir James Jeans). Thus modern Science has come round to the metaphysical view that time and space have only a conceptual and no real existence. From the spiritual standpoint it is a movement of consciousness which constitutes time and space. These two are merely two aspects of the universal force of consciousness, which in their interaction comprehend the warp and woof of its action upon itself. Time and space are the one Conscious Being viewing itself in extension subjectively as time, objectively as space. Space cannot be considered separately from but has to be connected with time, and it is by doing this that the theory of relativity has been able to interpret experiments.

"Nature is such," says Sir James Jeans, "that it is impossible to measure an absolute velocity by any means whatever. In brief, Nature is concerned only with relative velocities, there is no fixed background of points against which motion can be measured in absolute terms, and consequently no absolute flow of time against which

intervals of time can be measured." The *Isha Upanishad* thus describes the ultimate Spiritual Reality :

"One unmoving that is swifter than the Mind, That the gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing passes beyond others as they run. In that the Master of Life establishes the Waters.¹

That moves and that moves not ; That is far and the same is near ; That is within all this and That also is outside all this."

The obvious suggestion of this language of the *Upanishad* is that our ordinary notions of space and time, of motion and rest, are quite inadequate to describe Reality; and this is exactly what the theory of relativity is teaching us to-day. Science gives an account of this reality in mathematical formulas which are admittedly nothing more than symbols which serve to correlate natural phenomena. "In the natural sciences," says Prof. Herman Weyl, "we are in

¹ The Waters, otherwise called the seven streams or the seven fostering cows, are the Vedic symbol for the seven cosmic principles and their activity, three inferior, the physical, vital and mental, four superior, the divine Truth, the divine Bliss, the divine Will and Consciousness, and divine Being.—*Isha Upanishad* by Sri Aurobindo..

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contact with a sphere which is impervious to intuitive evidence; here cognition necessarily becomes symbolical construction." The Upanishads also use symbols in their own way to interpret and correlate facts of inner experience. They deal with the same Reality, but from different sides and for a different purpose. (Science deals with knowledge which is helpful for the external organisation of life; the Upanishads deal with knowledge which is indispensable for the organisation of the inner subjective life of man; and both kinds of knowledge are necessary for his integral perfection.) One of the most striking findings of modern Science is the principle of economy in Nature. All light takes the quickest path from point to point, and in this respect all moving bodies behave like light; always there is the least time, or, in the more precise language of relativity, the least interval. In the matter of knowledge also, Nature has followed the principle of the "least interval." The East specialised in the inner spiritual knowledge, and has found by experience that by itself it is not sufficient. The West specialised in the outer scientific knowledge, and is fast coming to a similar conclusion that it is not sufficient by itself. In the language

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of the *Upanishad*, "Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the *Avidya* (the outer knowledge), they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to *Vidya* (the inner spiritual knowledge) alone." The West, whatever its defects, is struggling to overcome them and rise to a better order of life; but India has fallen into a deep slough of despondence and lifelessness, which is certainly a greater darkness. Nature now points to a synthesis of the inner and the outer knowledge, of the East and the West, so that her goal of a perfected humanity on the earth may be speedily realised.

II

DETERMINISM AND EVOLUTION

The deterministic position of science which was the other main prop of materialism has been definitely abandoned by the Quantum theory. "The only determinism of which modern physics is at all sure is of a merely statistical kind. We still see the actions of the vast crowds of molecules or particles conforming to determinism—this is of course the determinism we observe in our everyday life, the basis of the

so-called law of the uniformity of nature. But no determinism has so far been found in the motions of separate individuals; on the contrary, the phenomena of radio-activity and radiation rather suggest that these do not move as they are pushed and pulled by inexorable forces; so long as we picture them as in time and space, their future appears to be undetermined and uncertain at every step. They may go one way or another if nothing intervenes to direct their paths; they are not controlled by predetermined forces, but only by the statistical laws of probability." (*The New Background of Science*)

If the physical forces had been left to their random interplay, life and mind need never have appeared, on the face of the earth. Some new principle or force came to direct the movement of the material particles and energy in a particular way so as to produce the phenomena of life. It did not circumvent the laws of Nature but the laws of probability. Living beings do not violate the laws of physical nature. I, for example, can only impart momentum to my body by pushing off from other bodies, which thereby take on an opposite momentum. Still there is something mysterious in a living body which is

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absent in the inanimate. A clump of clay may possess all the atoms necessary to build up a lotus, but left to itself its dream of the lotus will never be fulfilled. The potentiality of life is there in matter, but it requires a new principle, the pressure of some new force to develop that potentiality. That principle or force is called the vital which has changed the whole face of the earth by its operation; and it has acted not by interfering with the laws of physical nature, but by giving a new direction, a new organisation.

It was maintained that the operation of the vital principle also was deterministic and mechanical. Darwin and Lamarck tried to show that the process of evolution in the animal world can be explained by the mechanical principle of natural selection. But such phenomena as sport or mutation and metamorphosis conclusively show that biological evolution cannot be explained by a theory of mechanical variation and adaptation to environment. "A very inferior organism," says Bergson, "is as well adapted as ours to the conditions of existence, judged by its success in maintaining life; why, then, does life, which has succeeded in adapting itself, go on complicating

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itself and complicating itself more and more dangerously? Why did not life stop whenever it was possible? Why has it gone on? Why, indeed, unless it be that there is an impulse driving it to take ever greater and greater risks towards its goal of an ever higher and higher efficiency?"

The adaptation of means to end, which is so apparent in the vital world, shows that the guiding principle has intelligence which is a mark of consciousness. That consciousness may not be of the same order as our waking consciousness. But modern psycho-analysis has shown that our ordinary waking consciousness is only a small part of our conscious life; many important processes go on in the subliminal part of our consciousness, in the subconscious. The consciousness that operates in plants and trees is of this subliminal kind; there is not only an intelligent adaptation of means to end, there is also a crude feeling of pleasure and pain, as has been experimentally shown by Sir J. C. Bose. Plants and trees try in their own way to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and their dominant impulse is to preserve and continue themselves so that they may have the joy of existence, pain being

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associated with destruction or death. Thus the search for immortality is not the monopoly of human beings only; life from its very beginning shows an urge towards it, and it has actually achieved some sort of immortality on the earth. The individual dies but the seed takes up its life and develops it through innumerable generations.

If we go lower in the scale, we find evidence of consciousness even in material bodies, in their constituent electrons, protons, and photons. Science is chowing how they obey laws which can be mathematically stated. It is the consciousness in them which enables them to obey the laws, but that consciousness does not find a suitable organ there to manifest itself and thus remains behind. In the vital world that consciousness has found some instrument of manifesting itself, but still the manifestation is simple and crude. It is when life developed into animals and lastly into men that consciousness could come more and more to the front; and for this further step in the terrestrial evolution another new principle was necessary, the mental. Bergson does not make a distinction between the vital and the mental principles; according to him both mind and life

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are operations of the same principle which he calls the *e'lan vital*. In a sense, not only life and mind but also matter is an aspect of the same reality; they are all parts and functions of universal Nature. Modern Science is approaching more and more the ancient Vedantic doctrine that reality is essentially one. The living organism reacts as a whole; its functions are not additive. According to quantum physics, the same applies to inorganic nature. The state of a system consisting of two electrons determines the states of both electrons, but the converse does not follow. This shows that electrons and protons belong fundamentally to the same order of nature to which plants and animals are subject. Still there is a differentiation in the same reality as it manifests itself in the world. As the vital principle is differentiated from the physical, so the mental is differentiated from both of them; and the appearance of mind has brought forward an altogether new organisation of life and matter, the acme of which we see in man and his civilisation. Spiritual experience reveals the existence of different planes of existence, of graded worlds, which act and react on each other. "The material world has evolved life in obedience to a

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pressure from the vital plane, mind in obedience to a pressure from the mental plane. It is now trying to evolve supermind in obedience to a pressure from the supramental plane."

. Indeed there is no reason why terrestrial evolution should arbitrarily stop with man and his mind. Has its goal of perfection been reached? As the mind can only search for knowledge but can never possess it, so it has high ideals which it pursues but can never realise. There is nothing in modern Science which goes against the probability of the emergence of yet another principle, which may be called the supramental, which will bring the organisation of mind, life, and matter to a still higher order where alone all the idealistic dreams of man can be fulfilled. And the highest spiritual vision to-day sees in the travail of mankind the birth-pangs of such a higher order of life, of a new race on the earth, as the last fulfilment of her long evolutionary process.

The evolution in Nature went on by a sub-conscious urge until in man she has risen to a mental consciousness. The next step is to be taken consciously by man. This conscious process of self-perfection in man is called Yoga. But has

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man any real freedom thus to achieve his perfection? In what way can man help or hinder the evolution of his nature? "Honestly I cannot understand," says Einstein, "what people mean when they talk about freedom of the human will." Yet people have been talking about it since the beginning of civilisation and culture. Every human being somehow feels himself to be a free agent. Wherein consists his freedom and how far does it go? Indian spiritual philosophy has solved this problem by making a distinction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, which is made the basis of all Yogic practice. The *Gita* states almost in the language of Einstein, "While the actions are being entirely done by the modes of Nature, he whose self is bewildered by egoism thinks that it is his 'I' which is doing them." *Purusha* in *Prakriti*, Soul in Nature, is the formula of man. Nature is doing all action by her modes; the Soul is the Sakshi, the observer. But it is also the giver of the sanction. The play of *Prakriti* will cease if the *Purusha* does not support her by his sanction. *Purusha*, by withholding his sanction from, or giving it to, particular modes of Nature can exercise a selective effect. As we have already seen, such a selective action on the pro-

cesses of Nature is admitted as possible by modern Science. We can only mention here the intelligent microscopic being introduced into Science by the Cambridge physicist Clerk Maxwell, as is generally known as "Maxwell's demon." "Although the demon does not interfere with the operation of the laws of Nature, yet he exercises a selective effect, and by this alone he can cause any system to pass to a lower entropy."

There are a higher and a lower play in our human nature. One leads towards knowledge, peace, harmony, joy; the other leads towards ignorance, strife, sorrow. The soul in us has to observe with detachment the play of the different modes of nature in us, withhold its sanction from the lower play, and give its sanction to the higher. In this way our human nature will be disciplined and purified as a preparation for its ultimate transformation into the divine nature. But this last transformation is beyond all human effort; it can be achieved only by the divine Grace. That is why there comes in as the last movement the necessity of an absolute self-surrender. We have to offer our whole being, our mind, life, and body to the Divine in an absolute self-consecration so that they may be filled with His Light, Peace,

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Power and Bliss. That is Immortality, and that is the goal towards which all humanity is marching consciously or unconsciously. To hasten that march by conscious effort, by an unflinching faith and a fixed and unfailing aspiration is the whole meaning of spiritual practice or *sadhana*.

III

METHODS OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

This is not to say that Science has become spiritual or that spirituality has been placed on a scientific basis in the usual sense of the term. That cannot be in the very nature of things. Science depends ultimately on the evidence of the senses. Nothing that cannot be verified by a reference to the senses will be accepted by Science as a fact, a truth. This position of Science is perfectly valid, as no one can quarrel with it for having chosen a particular field for its investigation, the field of sense-experience. But when Science says that this is the whole of knowledge, that whatever can be verified by observation and experiment with the senses is true, everything else is false, mere fancy, Science goes beyond its jurisdiction and becomes *ultra vires*.

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So long as Science did this its quarrel with philosophy and spirituality was inevitable. But recent discoveries seem to have had a chastening effect on Science. As Dr. Hermann Weyl pointed out in a lecture delivered at the Yale University, "modern Science makes the world appear more and more as an open one, as a world not closed but pointing beyond itself."

"As there is a category of facts," says Sri Aurobindo, "to which our senses are the best available but very imperfect guides, as there is a category of truths which we seek by the keen but still imperfect light of our reason, so according to the mystics, there is a category of more subtle truths which surpass the reach both of the senses and the reason but can be ascertained by an inner direct knowledge and direct experience. These truths are supersensuous, but not the less real for that; they have immense results upon the consciousness changing its substance and movement, bringing especially deep peace and abiding joy, a great light of vision and knowledge, a possibility of the overcoming of the lower animal nature, vistas of a spiritual self-development which without them do not exist. A new outlook on things arises which brings

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with it, if fully pursued into its consequences, a greater liberation, inner harmony, unification—many other possibilities besides. These things have been experienced, it is true, by a small minority of the human race, but still there has been a host of independent witnesses to them in all times, climes and conditions and numbered among them are some of the greatest intelligences of the past, some of the world's most remarkable figures."

Science has powerfully dominated the modern mind chiefly for two reasons. It takes the commonsense view of not accepting anything which is not attested by the senses; it is supposed to be positive, it does not speculate, does not "quack"; it deals with hard tangible facts. Also Science has been of great practical help to mankind. The common mind is easily impressed by spectacular results and dazzling success. People put more reliance on scientists who provide them with electric lights, steamships, aeroplanes than on clergymen who ask them to mourn in this world so that they may be comforted in Heaven. Only when a deeper view is taken, it is seen that the methods of scientific knowledge are not so reliable as they are commonly supposed to be, and all scientists admit "the general uncertainty that

surrounds all our attempts to probe into the secrets of nature."

Science collects data from sense observation, and arrives at generalisations from them by reasoning. Every student of logic knows how many possibilities of error there are in this process. It is to the credit of Science that it takes great care to avoid these errors as far as possible. It observes many instances of the phenomenon under investigation, so that the errors of mal-observation and non-observation may cancel each other. Yet, it can never be sure that all errors have been eliminated. So whenever possible Science tests its generalisations by experiments. Those who have any real knowledge of spirituality and do not confuse it with table-rapping, mesmerism or "spiritual seance," know that it also takes at least as much care as Science so that its truths may be a body of ascertained knowledge; only its methods are different. Science proceeds by elaborate observations of external phenomena, spirituality proceeds by training and disciplining the inner instruments of knowledge. As an agitated surface of water cannot give a correct reflection, so the restless mind is not a fit instrument of knowledge. When the rational critic

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ridicules "the wisdom obtained by staring at your own navel," he only makes a gross and stupid caricature of a well-known *Rajayogic asana* or sitting posture where the yogin makes his mind and senses calm and quiet so that they may give a true reflection of the truth. Spirituality does not depend, like Science, on making inferences from external observations and experiments, but it has a direct method of knowing which alone can give certain knowledge. The true knowledge is seated within us above the mind. When the mind is stilled, that knowledge reveals itself as the all-illuminating sun, so says the *Gita*. It is not the reasoning of the mind, but a silent aspiration steadily rising from the soul that alone can remove "the brilliant golden lid (our mental thoughts and reasonings) with which the face of Truth is covered." (*Isha Upanishad*)

Whatever care the scientists may take, they can never be positive about their knowledge on account of the defects that are inherent in their methods. It was left for twentieth-century physics, under the lead of Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg, to discover how large a subjective tinge entered into the nineteenth-century description of Nature; recognising this, it tries to discard our human

spectacles and study the objective reality that lies beyond. But it has to do this still with the mind and it cannot leap over its own shadow. And not only does the mind bring always a subjective tinge, in the very act of observation, and more so in experiment, we disturb the objective world and cannot have a correct knowledge of it. One tramping in a desert sees the desert as covered by the dust raised by himself.

A scientist gets his data from observation and experiment. But what does he actually observe? He observes only the effects that are produced on his senses or his instruments: such effects can be produced only when energy is in some way transferred to them. The material structure of all objects, according to modern Science, is built up of two kinds of electrified particles, protons and electrons. But these can never be made objects of direct observation; they are supposed to exist as the source of the energy which affects our sense-organs. There is only one observable ingredient—the impact of photons or particles of energy on our senses or instruments. But when a photon leaves an object to give its knowledge to us, it gives a kick to the object at the time of starting, and by the time the

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photon has reached us, the world of which it brings an account has already changed. When an astronomer observes the position of a star in the sky and announces it as a fact, he assumes that light travels in a rectilinear path. But this assumption is nothing but a theory. Thus the "hard facts" of Science are, in the words of Prof. Eddington, "in any case theoretical interpretations of the observations."

One phenomenon is enough to disprove a theory, but a million do not suffice to prove it. That is really the position of Science and its methods of proof. It is rejecting one theory after another saying "not this," "not this," *neti, neti*, but can never say with certainty, "it is this."

As long as there is a division between subject and object, between the knower and the known, the observer and the observed, there can be no positive knowledge. This sort of knowing is the mind's way, and it can give only partial knowledge which may be useful so far as it goes, but cannot stand any ultimate test of truth. True knowledge can only be by identity. Even in ordinary life we can know or understand a thing or person better when we become one with it

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by sympathy. All spiritual knowledge is ultimately of this kind. For me the most certain knowledge is that I exist, I am conscious, I feel the joy of existence. All knowledge can be ultimately reduced to this formula. The universe exists in the Self, in God; and in our inmost being we are one with the Self, with God. Only when we rise beyond the mind and enter into the consciousness of the Self, we can have a true knowledge of the universe. And the knowledge which the self-vision gives us is not of the nature of scientific knowledge—"not this" "not this"; it is always positive as the famous *Vedantic* sayings: "I am He," "Thou art that, O Swetaketu," "all this world is Brahman."

It is also a mistake to suppose that scientific knowledge advances only by observation and experiment and generalisation from them. The highest truths of Science come to the discoverer in a flash of inspiration; reasoning is afterwards used to give an intellectual formulation of truths so received. Some external observation may give the necessary shock to the mind, but the truth comes directly and intuitively from within. Seeing an apple fall from the tree, Newton instantaneously perceived a truth which he afterwards

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formulated as the law of gravitation and verified by observation and experiments. The truth about floating bodies suddenly flashed in the mind of Archimedes when he was taking bath, and wild with joy he came out naked into the street crying, *ureka, ureka*, I have found it, I have found it. The formula of the Lorentz Transformation was before the scientists for more than a decade. It was left for Einstein to see in a moment of inspiration that the quantity "*t*" measuring the time was to be regarded as a fourth co-ordinate. But such flashes of inspiration or intuition are very rare, and when they occur, they create new epochs in the advance of knowledge. Spirituality has seen that this power of intuition can be made a normal function of the mind like its use of the senses, as indeed it always stands veiled behind our mental operations. Yogic practice aims at intuitivising the mind completely so that it may correctly reflect the knowledge by identity which is inherent in the higher self.

IV

LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE

Though the rationalists swear by science, it cannot give an account of the world which

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will be fully satisfactory even to the reason, because it limits itself in its data to sense-experience. Reason in its pure action does not depend on the senses, it has its own standard of truth, and seeks to go beyond the senses so as to give a consistent explanation of things. This is what is done in metaphysics or philosophy. Science by itself can neither meet the demand of human reason for a consistent account of the world as a whole, nor lead to a satisfactory "rational" order of society. These limitations of science are becoming more and more recognised to-day. "Photons, electrons and protons," says Sir James Jeans, "have become as meaningless to the physicist as x , y , z are to a child on its first day of learning algebra. The most we hope for at the moment is to discover ways of manipulating x , y , z , without knowing what they are, with the result that the advance of knowledge is at present reduced to what Einstein has described as extracting one incomprehensible from another incomprehensible."

Even recalcitrant materialists, who regard "idealism as pure literary sport like lyric poetry," have begun to describe the diminished state of science. In a book called *Some Turns of Thought*

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in *Modern Philosophy*, published by the Cambridge University Press, George Santayana writes: "We are bombarded with inventions but if we ask the inventors what they have learnt of the depths of nature, which somehow they have probed with such astonishing success, their faces remain blank." When it is admitted that the theories of science are elaborate metaphors rather than blue prints of reality, that the "true theories are more useful practically or more suggestive artistically, rather than more close to the intrinsic qualities of things, the philosopher can then use science as an ally in his endless effort to describe life in the terms most satisfactory to the imagination of his age."

The outlook on the physical universe is undergoing a profound change. "New concepts will have to be elaborated," says Mr. J. W. N. Sullivan in *Limitations of Science*, "and the key to these new concepts is probably to be found in the study of psychology which is at present in a very early stage of development." This is only another way of saying that we must go deep within ourselves, and from self-knowledge arrive at world-knowledge; and this was exactly the standpoint of the ancient seers of India where psychology had reach-

ed a high stage of development even in very early times.¹ "From as early as the times of the Vedas, the Indian mind had recognised that the same general laws and powers hold in spiritual, psychical, and physical being; it discovered the omnîpresence of life, affirmed the evolution of the soul in Nature from the vegetable and the animal to the human form, stated on the basis of philosophic intuition and spiritual and psychological experience many of the truths which modern knowledge is re-affirming from the other side as it passes from the study of physical nature to the study of life and mind." (*A Defence of Indian Culture* by Sri Aurobindo)

The generalisations at which modern science has reached have thus been summed up by Sir James Jeans: "We can no longer think of the varied phenomena of nature as arising from a blind dance of atoms as they are pushed and pulled by mechanical force; we must attribute them to efforts of we know not what to find the

¹ A distinguished French psychologist says that India had already laid down all the large lines and main truths, the broad scheme, of a genuine psychology and all that Europe can do now is to fill them in with exact details and scientific verifications.

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shortest path through the tangled maze of the space-time continuum." Indian philosophy, starting from the other side, from psychological study and spiritual experience, found three fundamental properties of Prakriti or Nature, three gunas as they are called, sattwa or harmony, rajas or motion, tamas or inertia. "There is no entity in the world," says the Gita, "which is not subject to the workings of these three qualities (gunas) born of nature." In every natural existence the three gunas are there in their inextricable working, and all action of nature is merely the action of these three modes upon each other, a functioning in which one or other predominates and the rest modify its operation and results. But this is only a description of the outer working of nature. What moves the world is not really the modes of Prakriti,—these are only the lower aspects, the mechanism of nature. The real motive power is a divine spiritual Will which uses these conditions, but is itself not limited, not dominated, not mechanised by them. The process of the world is a progressive realisation of harmony in which the Spirit is expressing itself. A perfect harmony has already been established in the material world, and it is this which is being dis-

covered and stated in mathematical formulas by physical science. But the vital world seeks to manifest a higher and more complex harmony, which has not yet been accomplished anywhere as is evidenced by the phenomena of disease, old age and death. There is even less harmony in the world of mind, in man. In his pursuit of a still higher harmony, in his aspiration for the Good, the True, the Beautiful, man has lost the vital harmony which is realised in plants and animals. The aspiration of man can only be fulfilled when there emerges a still higher principle, the supermind, which is the source of all harmony and which alone can make the harmony of mind, life and body complete and perfect thus fulfilling the purpose of human creation. This is the highest generalisation about man and the world at which Indian philosophy has reached taking not mere sense-experience, but the deepest spiritual experience as the source and sanction of its truth.

In the field of action also science has shown glaring limitations, though it undoubtedly has immense possibilities for the welfare of mankind. "The function of the machine," says Mr. Henry Ford, "is to liberate man from brute burdens

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and release his energies to the building of his intellectual and spiritual powers." But for the want of the guidance of a higher knowledge in human affairs, science has hitherto failed to satisfy the high expectations raised. It has been calculated by expert economists that there are in the markets of the world to-day goods sufficient to maintain the people of the world more than two years, supposing no stroke of work is done in the interval; yet millions of men, women and children are living in a state of semi-starvation all over the world. America is supposed to have reached the high-watermark of scientific efficiency. When President Roosevelt took office, more than 30,000,000 people, or between a quarter and a third of the entire nation, were dependent for their support upon public or private relief. Worshippers of science point out that it was the knowledge of chemistry that enabled Germany to fight against the world for four long years, and that it is that knowledge which has enabled it to recover so speedily from the consequences of a most disastrous defeat. But the same chemistry with its microbes and poison gas will make an end of modern civilisation within a decade or two unless something like a miracle

happens in the meantime, for which, however modern science has kept an "open place."

Mr. H. G. Wells never tires of reminding the world that it is on the verge of ruin; but he still pins his faith on science and mechanical organisations. A few years ago he thought that it was only priest-ridden fools who were against him. Now he seems convinced that the human race is steeped in folly; since reason will not turn it to the world-state, it must be scourged with decades of pestilence and slaughter. In his book, *The Shape of Things to Come*, he pictures a peaceful and hygienic world which can only come through science and world-state. "The one way out," says Sri Aurobindo, "harped on by the modern mind which has been as much blinded as enlightened by the victories of physical science, is the approved Western device of salvation by machinery; get the right kind of machine to work and everything can be done, this seems to be the modern creed. But the destinies of mankind cannot be turned to order in an American factory. It is a subtler thing than that which is now putting its momentous problem before us, and if the spirit of the things we profess is absent or falsified, no method or

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machinery can turn them out for us or deliver the promised goods. That is the one truth which the scientific and industrialised modern mind forgets always, because it looks at process and commodity and production and ignores the spirit in man and the deeper inner law of his being."

V

SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Materialism has failed; it has been tried and found wanting in theory as well as in practice. But though the scientists are coming a long way round to a spiritual view of the world, it is curious that the leaders of the Christian church in the West are severely critical of such attempt. The Bishop of Birmingham, for example, has recently warned his flock that the scientific party is drawing nearer to Christ than the church congregations. The war between religion and science has been almost the leading phenomenon of European culture. Even philosophy and science have been unable to agree. The Western people regard religion as a matter of mere belief; it is a system of creeds and dogmas which one has simply to accept or reject according to his

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personal temperament or leaning. "I believe because or although it is rationally impossible"—that is the Western attitude towards religion. On the other hand, science is a system of verifiable truths, "deeply rooted in the fertile soil of experience," which every one must accept and follow in life. God,^b Soul, Immortality, with which religion deals, can never be made objects of scientific proof. How can then there be any reconciliation between science and religion, how can religion be made a serious business of life? As the Romans built images of gods not for worshipping them but for decorating their cities, so their inheritors in civilisation and culture have made religion only an ornament of life. Many cultured people in the West take pride in saying that carefully searching their consciousness they do not find even a trace of religious feeling.

In India on the other hand the ideal has been to turn the whole of life into religion, into a search for God-realisation; and there has always been a harmony, consensus, union between science, philosophy and spirituality. They are all "deeply rooted in experience," they only differ in their scope and function. "If our philosophy admits an ultimate unthinkable and unknowable, it does

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not concern itself with any positive description or analysis of that—the absurdity the rationalist ascribes to it,—it concerns itself with whatever is thinkable and knowable to us at the highest term as well as on the lower ranges of our experience. If it has been able to make its conclusions articles of religious faith, it is because it has been able to base them on an experience verifiable by any man who will take the necessary means and apply the only possible tests. The Indian mind does not admit that the only possible test of values or of reality is the scientific, the test of a scrutiny of physical Nature or the every-day normal facts of our psychology. What are the tests of these more ordinary or objective values? Evidently experience, experimental analysis and synthesis, reason and intuition,—for I believe the value of intuition is admitted now-a-days by modern philosophy and science. The tests of this other order of truths are the same, experience, experimental analysis and synthesis, reason and intuition; only, since these things are truths of the soul and spirit, it must necessarily be a psychological and spiritual experience, a psychological and psychophysical experimentation, analysis and synthesis, a large intuition which looks into higher realms

and realities and possibilities of being, a reason which admits something beyond itself, looks upward to the suprarational, tries to give as far as may be an account of it to the human intelligence. Yoga is itself nothing but a well-tested means of opening up this greater realm of experience." (*A Defence of Indian Culture*)

There is a truth in the attitude of those who cry that if there be a God, a Soul, they must be found out by the telescope or in the dissecting room. The truth is this that God or Spirit as seen by the senses is Matter. To the crude physical senses God can appear only as a material system. Only those who regard it as a blasphemy to say that Matter is God will never find the true unity between religion and science. "Matter and the material media are themselves derivative powers and at bottom are only ways or conditions in which the workings of the quality of Nature in things manifest themselves to the sensory consciousness of the Jiva. The one original and eternal fact is the energy of Nature, the power and quality of being which so manifested itself to the soul through the senses. But energy or power of being in Nature is the Divine himself in his Prakriti." (*Essays on the Gita*)

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When Laplace said that he did not see any place for God in the universe, he failed to see the wood on account of the trees. Seeing the world is seeing God. The physical universe with its vastness, grandeur and harmony is the Divine in one of its innumerable aspects. The more powerful the telescope we invent, the greater becomes the number of stars and galaxies appearing in the sky. "A faint cluster of nebulae in Gemini, which at present marks the limit of our soundings of space, takes us back to 150 million years into the past—to the time when the light now reaching us started on its journey across the gulf of space." That is what the mind understands by infinity, and infinity is an attribute of God. With the progress of science, the definite concrete laws of Nature stand before us in their wonderfully transparent mathematical harmony which again is our conception of the Divine perfection. "In every true searcher of Nature," says Einstein, "there is a kind of religious reverence." The scientists who regard this wonderful, beautiful, sublime world with an intellectual love, *amor Dei intellectualis*, are religious in their own way and have their reward. "As men approach me," says the Lord in the Gita, "so

I accept them to my love ; men follow in every way my path." But in order to realise the integral perfection of our nature, we have to approach and have touch with the Divine in all ways of being, *sarvabhavena*, and in order to be able to do that we must have an integral knowledge of ourselves, of the universe around us, of God ; and science alone cannot give us this all-compassing integral knowledge. Science becomes materialistic and goes beyond its jurisdiction when it says that the material aspect is the whole of truth and that there is nothing beyond it. It is this attitude which modern science seems to have given up definitely. It attacks the enigma of the physical universe by giving up the main enigma—the nature of the objective universe—as insoluble and concentrating on the minor puzzle of co-ordinating our observations of the universe. But human reason in its search for knowledge cannot stop with the meagre account which science can give with its limited methods. In its pure function it leaves the bondage of the senses, and seeks to give a complete account of the world which will be self-consistent and thus satisfactory to itself.

As God appears as matter to the senses, as an infinite source of energy which impinges upon

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our sense-organs, so to the intelligence He appears as a rational being with the same kind of intelligence as ours, only on an infinitely vast scale. Our human intelligence proceeds by adaptation of means to end, by trials and experiments, with alternate success and failure, towards the realisation of some goal. We see all this in the world on a vast scale. Only when one goes beyond the mind, and sees with the eyes of the Spirit in which he is essentially one with God, he enters into the consciousness of God Himself, and sees Him in an integral vision where all the antinomies and imperfections of our knowledge are transcended and the Divine is seen in His true spiritual perfection and harmony.

The function of philosophy is to state in intellectual terms as far as possible the truths seen in the deepest self-vision and correlate them with the generalisations at which physical science arrives by its own methods of interpreting sense-experience. It is not that spiritual truths require verification by science; on the contrary, the generalisations of science will find their final corroboration in the light of spiritual experience. Science can never give the decisive experience or the spiritual certitude for which the soul

is seeking. But we live in a world of sense-experience, and the integral perfection of man does not consist merely in an inner spiritual life but also in its realisation in the outer life of the mind, life and body. Herein comes the utility of science both as an instrument of knowledge co-ordinating the phenomena of sense-experience and as an aid to human perfection building the outer organisation of life. It will fulfil its function properly only when it becomes a minister and not a rival of spirituality. "What science calls laws of Nature," says Sri Aurobindo, "are not the absolute or principal laws of existence, but only minor rules meant to build up a material basis for the life of the spirit in the body. On that has to be erected in the end, not a rule of material Law but an immortal liberty, not law of Nature, but freedom of the Spirit. The strife of forces which is regulated by these minor laws of Nature is only the battle through which man has to win the peace of the Spirit."

"To have peace we must undergo something like a spiritual revolution." It is not very uncommon now-a-days to meet with such a view expressed by writers in the West. But the Western mind has not yet got any clear conception about

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spirituality. An economist of international reputation, writing recently about "Nazi Economics," says, "its fundamental spiritual notions are communistic." As generally understood by the West, spirituality, at best, consists of the higher and subtler functions of the mind and the intellect; while the truth is that the mind is only a lower form of the spirit, and human reason or human science can only be at best a minister of the spirit. The message which G. B. Shaw finds it important to deliver at the "present world crisis" through his book, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*, shows how grossly spirituality is being misunderstood even by the foremost minds in the West. According to him the greatness of Jesus consisted in his high "intellectual level"; and he finds that the only way of saving the Bible from the universal wreck of traditional things is to point out how rich it is in historical knowledge and the teaching of socialism. In his brighter moments G. B. S. is even tempted to think that there was not one Christian among the disciples of Jesus, and that Judas was the only one who showed any gleams of commonsense!

The Bible, even in its sixteenth century English translation, is as fresh as ever, and one

can get from it as much hint and guidance for the building up of a higher divine life as he is capable of receiving. But the church fathers still cling to outworn creeds and dogmas, like the orthodox priests and pundits in India, thereby bringing ridicule upon religion and spirituality as a whole. Jesus Christ and other *avatars* of the Divine come to the earth at critical times assuming the human form so that from their personal example man may learn the secret of a divine life in the human body and under terrestrial conditions, and the Kingdom of Heaven may be built in the life of humanity. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within us." But this ancient saying has been interpreted too literally by most religions in the world. It is within, but it has to be realised outside—otherwise the message becomes meaningless. For everyone in his inner being is divine; but his destiny as man on the earth is to bring that kingdom into the outer life of the mind, life and body, and not to wait for salvation in some far-off Heaven after death. The true significance of the saying is this that before man can realise a perfect outer organisation of his life in politics, economics or society, he must find out the kingdom within and make the

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outer life an expression of the inner. But the Western people, too much pre-occupied as they are with their Five-Year Plans, National Recovery Acts, Disarmament Conferences, economic nationalism, national socialism and so many other "isms," cannot look to the organisation of the inner life of man and build from within outwards. That is a message which the Western mind has not yet grasped; it must now come in a concrete and creative form from the East, especially from India where the experiment has been going on systematically for thousands of years and is only now nearing its fruition.

VI

GOD AND THE WORLD

The "Great Tradition" to which the Christian church still clings makes a sharp division between God and the world which He has created as an expression of His will and in fulfilment of His purpose. Man must go outside this imperfect world and find his salvation in the real world, which is a "kingdom of values". This dogma is sought to be supported by a new reading of the Platonic philosophy; but it gets no re-inforcement

from the discoveries of modern Science, which finds a divine order, a perfect harmony in the world itself, in the physical world, and a progressive harmony also in the field of life and mind. The nineteenth century, dominated by the marvellous discoveries of science, believed in an irreducible law of progress for life as a whole, and for human life in particular; and the early twentieth century went farther and reaped a crop of philosophies which identified God with progress. God in this view is the vital principle of an eternally progressive universe. To the orthodox church this is blasphemy. Dean Inge, in his book, *God and the Astronomers*, taunts this immanentist theory by saying that God became conscious somewhere during the Napoleonic wars. Modern thought, on the other hand, seeks to make a clear riddance of a tradition which puts "God far above in distant heavens making man too much of a worm of the earth, little and vile before his creator, and admitted only by a caprice of his favour to a doubtful salvation in superhuman worlds." There are many rationalists in the West to-day who regard it almost as immoral to have a religious feeling. But God cannot be so summarily dismissed; He returns.

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The urge for the Divine is inherent in man, however covered up it may be by a "feeling for Nature or the spell which great works of Art cast upon us"; and the inability to reconcile it essentially with life constitutes the tragedy of modern culture, and lies at the root of the present world crisis.

A way can be seen out of this confusion if the religions of the world give up worn-out creeds and dogmas and accept a rational view of the world which will be acceptable to the modern mind. And there is nothing wrong in this. Theology, philosophy or even religion is not the essence of spirituality. To find our true relation with God is the aim of spirituality, and only the soul in us can find that relation. But in order that the soul may be awakened in us, we have to begin with mental effort and mental seeking, and this necessitates that we have a view of God and the world which will be satisfactory to our mind and reason. A philosophical account which satisfied the mind of the ancient people was accepted by spirituality at that time not as a final truth but as a symbolical expression which might be helpful to man in his spiritual endeavour. "All wise men, all the most

divine and holy teachers," says Nicolous of Cusa, "agree that every visible thing is an image of the invisible, which to us is imperceptible except in a mirror and in enigmas." Philosophy, art, science—all in their own way may help to awaken the soul in man and strengthen his aspiration, which alone can open the doors of the spirit and bring him to a true knowledge and a true relation with the Divine. All mental knowledge is partial and symbolical. Mind by its very nature of seeing things only in parts and relations can never grasp reality as it is. Philosophy and science give symbolical accounts of the world; religion also provides symbolical rites and dogmas which may help man to discipline his mind and heart so that he may be prepared for the spiritual life. The God of Noah was not the God of Job, and both of them again differed from the God of Micah. But the worship they offered to their respective conceptions of God was accepted by the One who is the God of all and whom none has yet known wholly. No devotion is worthless or ineffective whatever its limitations. It has the one grand necessity, faith. "Whatever form of me any devotee with faith desires to worship," says the Lord in the Gita, "I make that faith of his firm

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and undeviating." By the force of that faith in his cult and worship he gets his desire and the spiritual realisation for which he is at the moment fitted.

It is not necessary that everyone should study philosophy in order to have a spiritual life. There are many ways to the divine, of the heart, the intellect, the will; and every one has to follow his own path, the law of his own nature. Ramakrishna did not study the Vedanta; on the contrary, it was a great advantage to him that he started practically without any literary education; he attained his realisation by a simple faith and an ardent aspiration. When the spiritual vision was opened to him he could master the substance of the Vedanta within a few hours. But when Vivekananda with a Western education and culture became his disciple, he found in the Vedanta a great weapon for conquering the rationalistic Western mind and turning it towards God. The Vedanta has since then been a solace to many in life and death all over the world. For a philosophical account of the world we need not confine ourselves to the dialogues of Plato or the dialectics of Shankaracharya; but taking as much help from them as possible, we must find a new

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philosophy which will take account of the discoveries of modern Science as also of the wonderful truths that are being revealed to the spiritual experience of our own age, and make a comprehensive synthesis. We find that in the Vedanta we have the broadest basis for such a synthetic philosophy. According to it the universe is not the whole of God, nor does it exist apart from God. The Gita is a recognised authority on the Vedanta and a great synthesis of Aryan spiritual culture. The Lord says in the Gita, "But what need is there of a multitude of details for this knowledge, O Arjuna? Take it thus that I am here in this world and everywhere. I support this entire universe with an infinitesimal portion of myself." God has not created men as pawns in a game with the laws of Nature as arbitrarily fixed rules; He has himself become man in order to manifest one of the infinite possibilities that lie hidden in His-Self; and the terrestrial evolution is a process of that manifestation. "It is an eternal portion of me that becomes the Jiva," says the Lord. The Supreme who becomes all creation, yet infinitely transcends it, is not a will-less cause aloof from his creation. He is the mighty Lord of the worlds and peoples, and governs all

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not only from within but from above, from his supreme transcendence. The Divine is the Unborn Eternal, the transcendental being who has no origin. But at the same time the divine transcendence is not a negation, nor is it an Absolute empty of all relation to the universe. All cosmic relation derives from this Supreme; all cosmic existences return to it and find in it alone their true and immeasurable existence; God is both transcendent and immanent, both personal and impersonal, and again above both personality and impersonality.

Seen in the light of this Vedantic account, the latest discoveries of science assume a new significance; and it gives an explanation of suffering and evil in the world which is not possible in any other account. The rationalistic critic would perhaps object that to regard God as both transcendent and immanent, as both personal and impersonal, is "to have it both ways." But Reality has many ways; it is our ignorant mind which can see only one way. What has the critic to say when modern science also has it both ways? According to relativity theory the complete field of force contains, besides the ordinary Newtonian attraction, a repulsive force varying

directly as the distance. Modern science pictures radiation sometimes as particles and sometimes as waves and also the same with electrons and protons. It finds that Nature shows both determinism and indeterminism. It cannot give a consistent account of natural phenomena without supposing that Reality has many ways. Referring to this necessity of having it both ways in science, Robert Milikan, one of the foremost workers in modern science, observes: "Experiment has told us that both theories (wave theory and particle theory) are right, and we have had the limitations of our knowledge jolted into us enough times lately in physics to believe it in spite of our inability to see as yet just now how the reconciliation is to be made. . . . But I do not think this particular problem ever worried the physicist, for he has always known that his ignorance was as yet quite ample enough to cover the links in the reconciliation that must exist."

Even in our ordinary experience we find that we are both personal and impersonal. We have a personality which is often a complex of many personalities, of saints and sinners; but it is only by rising to some degree of impersonality that we can truly create or enjoy anything in science,

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art or life. When we shall have it both ways perfectly, when rising above narrow egoism we shall in our impersonality identify ourselves with the one Self of all, and shall make our personality a conscious individual centre of the one Will which is manifesting itself in many ways in the world play, we shall reach our human perfection and rise to the life of the gods.

THE RIDDLE OF THIS WORLD

I

WESTERN THOUGHT AND YOGA

M. BERDYEV, one of the leading "Neo-Christians" of modern Russia, prophesies in his book, *The End of our Time*, the breakdown of modern civilisation, because he can find no meaning in any life in which the central principle is not a mystic communion with God. He loathes alike the acquisitiveness of capitalist society and the diabolism of communist Russia. "But unless his own special mystic insight," says a Western critic, "conveys meaning to his reader, his rhapsodies, whether of denunciation or of affirmation, will only leave him with the conviction that they are a means of escaping from the necessity of confronting a reality he cannot bear to face." It is widely admitted that human affairs to-day are in a muddle, that never before has mankind as a whole felt so hopelessly bewildered. ~~Materia-~~

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~~listic civilisation has failed, but neither does~~
~~mysticism seem to offer~~ a door of escape. It may, it is contended, enable a few individuals here and there to rise above the stress and turmoil of the world and enjoy peace of Nirvana, but it leaves the world as it is, or rather the poorer for the loss³ of some of its noblest souls. To these criticisms levelled against mysticism and Yoga by the modern scientific mind, Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Riddle of this World*, furnishes a complete and trenchant reply. "Yoga," he says, "is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience. Is not all knowledge and experience subjective at bottom? It is a fact that Yogic experience runs everywhere on the same lines." "The experiences of the medieval European *bhakta* or mystic are precisely the same in substance, however differing in names, forms, religious colouring, etc., as those of the mediaeval Indian *bhakta* or mystic—yet these people were not corresponding with one another or aware of each other's experiences and results as are modern scientists from New York to Yokohama. That would seem to show that there is something there identical, universal and presumably true—

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however the colour and the translation may differ because of the difference of mental language."

Sri Aurobindo's book does not, at least, leave on the mind of his reader the impression that he wants "to escape from the necessity of confronting a reality he cannot bear to face." As a matter of fact, it is not like an ordinary book written for the general public, which cannot go much beyond vague generalities, but it is a collection of letters and messages addressed to individuals who are earnestly striving to know the real truth about life and want to mould their lives in the light of that truth. This book is not what its title suggests, a treatise on philosophy; here there is no attempt to solve the riddle of the world by intellectual reasoning. In a simple, direct, forceful language, the author states the truth as he has seen it in his deep spiritual experiences, and only so much of it as has any bearing on the particular question before him. The subjects dealt with in the book are varied and of great practical interest. "Art, poetry, music are not Yoga," says Sri Aurobindo, "not in themselves things spiritual any more than Philosophy is a thing spiritual or Science. There lurks here another

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curious incapacity of the modern intellect—its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth that the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flashes, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light.” “Art, poetry, music, as they are in their ordinary functioning, create mental and vital, not spiritual values; but they can be turned to a higher end, and then, like all things that are capable of linking our consciousness to the Divine, they are transmuted and become spiritual and can be admitted as part of a life of Yoga. All takes new values not from itself but from the consciousness that uses it; for there is only one thing essential, needful, indispensable, to grow conscious of the Divine Reality and live in it and live it always.”

Speaking of Western Metaphysics, presumably to one of his Western disciples, Sri Aurobindo says, “Western thought has ceased to be dynamic; it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic amongst

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the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends. Later on, it became yet more purely intellectual and academic; it became intellectual speculation only without any practical ways and means for the attainment of the Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation. If there were not this difference, there would be no reason for seekers like yourself to turn to the East for guidance; for in the purely intellectual field, the Western thinkers are as competent as any Eastern sage. It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe."

With Sri Aurobindo, Yoga is not a means of escape from life and its problems but a means of transforming it into something divine where alone all the problems of life can find their true solution. He does not, like others, seek to starve and impoverish life as a means of spiritual progress; on the contrary, he regards the fullest development of the life-force as an indispensable means for a perfected divine life on earth. "The Life-Force in the vital is the indispensable instru-

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ment for all action of the Divine Power on the material world and the physical nature. It is therefore only when this vital is transformed and made a pure and strong instrument of the Divine Shakti that there can be a divine life." Sri Aurobindo has taken life in all its stern reality, with its desires and passions, doubts and aspirations, stress and suffering, and has proceeded to transform it into a vessel of divine light, peace, power, beatitude. You can call it an experiment, if you like. But it is not like the experiments which are carried on in the laboratories of scientists. It is rather a continuation and crowning of Nature's experiments in living things that have been proceeding for hundreds of millions of years.

II

TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN LIFE

Physical Science started to solve the riddle of this world with the help of the intellect, and it has achieved marvellous results in its own way. But its limitations are becoming more and more recognised. One feels oppressed by the physical notion derived from the second law of thermodynamics, that the universe is gradually running

down. "It emerged full-armed, as it were, out of nothing apparently for the sole purpose of blazing its way to an eternal death. This is the scientific account. It seems to be true as far as it goes, but we cannot believe that it is the whole truth. We prefer to believe that the present scientific method has its limitations." (*Limitations of Science* by J.W.N. Sullivan). Sri Aurobindo in his book, *The Riddle of this World*, writes thus about the limitations of Science: "Science has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila." Sri Aurobindo's book gives an account of the cosmic play as it is seen in the vision of one who has entered into the consciousness of the Magician himself.

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For the solution of many spiritual dilemmas and of the problems of rebirth, evil, suffering, we refer the reader to the book itself. Here we shall only touch briefly on his account of terrestrial evolution. The materialistic theory of evolution is admittedly a statement of certain processes of Nature ; it does not probe into her depths. In the discovery of filter-passing organisms and of the bacteriophage, it seems just the link intermediate between living and non-living matter has been found for which the scientists of the last century were searching. The mathematical theory of natural selection elaborated by Haldane and Fisher has thrown a flood of light on the process of evolution. But still it leaves the original riddle unsolved, how life evolved out of matter, and mind out of life. The Rishis of India have seen the Spirit to be the Reality of which the mind, life and body are lower forms. Spirit involved in matter is flowering into a spiritual divine life—that is the Yogic view of terrestrial evolution, and Sri Aurobindo's book gives a somewhat detailed account] of this essentially spiritual process. He speaks of different planes of existence, of the graded worlds acting and reacting on each other: "The [material world has evolved life in

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obedience to a pressure from the vital plane, mind in obedience to a pressure from the mental plane. It is now trying to evolve supermind in obedience to a pressure from the supramental plane."

This experience of the supermind is Sri Aurobindo's great contribution to the solution of the riddle of this world. The limitations of humanity, the stumbling ignorance of the mind, the tyrannous desires and passions of the vital, the dulness and inertia of the physical body, which make it subject to disease, old age, and death, can be overcome only by the power of the supermind. Sri Aurobindo does not enter into sterile discussions about the supermind. "The intellectual mind cannot even realise what the supermind is... It is not by reasoning but by constant experience, growth of consciousness and widening into the Light that one can reach those higher levels of consciousness above the intellect from which one can begin to look up to the Divine Gnosis." "The Vedic Rishis tried to rise individually to the supramental plane, but they did not bring it down and make it a permanent part of the earth-consciousness. Even there are verses of the Upanishad in which it is hinted that it is impossible to pass through the gates of

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the Sun (the symbol of the Supermind) and yet retain an earthly body. It was because of this failure that the spiritual effort of India culminated in Mayavada." Sri Aurobindo does not hold that this worldly life is Maya or illusion and that the one thing to do is to get beyond it into some immobile and inactive Silence. He has seen the goal of the terrestrial evolution to be a spiritual divine life on the earth and his "Yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power*not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the Supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth-consciousness."

Referring to a statement made by some one who has the gift of right vision, Sri Aurobindo says: "All that is said here about modern humanism and humanitarianism, the vain efforts of the sentimental idealist and the ineffective intellectual, about synthetic eclecticism and other kindred things is admirably clear-minded, it hits the target. It is not by these means that humanity can get that radical change of its ways of life which is yet becoming

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imperative, but only by reaching the bed-rock of Reality behind—not through mere ideas and mental formations, but by a change of the consciousness, an inner and spiritual conversion. But that is a truth for which it would be difficult to get a hearing in the present noise of all kinds of many-voiced clamour and confusion and catastrophe."

BASES OF YOGA

I

THE present life of man is a life in ignorance, and his mind is an instrument of that ignorance. The source of true light and illumination is the Divine seated within our heart; as the Lord says in the Gita, "I am lodged in the heart of all; from Me are memory and knowledge." But in our ordinary consciousness the Divine is hidden by a veil of Maya, *Yogamayasamavrita*, and that constitutes the source of all human ills and misery.

The ordinary life is that of the average human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the common habits of the mind, life and body which are the laws of the Ignorance. The religious life (as well as the moral life) is a movement of the same ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to turn away from earth towards the Divine but

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as yet without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific beyond.

The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue. The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness ignorant and separated from its true self and from God to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker, this change of consciousness is the only important thing, and nothing else matters.

The mind searches for the truth, but can never arrive at it; what it takes for the truth is nothing but a very partial, mixed and distorted reflection, and, as all our life is guided by this half-light which is often worse than darkness, its problems are never solved, and humanity in spite of stupendous efforts and sacrifices seems

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always to be moving in a vicious circle, its divine ideals of peace, harmony, light, power, joy, beauty remain as distant and unrealised as ever. The mind when it thinks and reasons can only see a part or aspect at a time and cannot take an integral view of things. That is why Truth, which has many sides and is very complex, always escapes human thought and reason. That is also why we find so many creeds and "isms" rampant in the world ; each contains some element of truth, none is complete by itself. But the real ignorance consists in this, that the follower of each creed or "ism" regards that only to be the real truth and the whole truth, and rejects and opposes everything else as falsehood. The world is thus rent with the conflict of ideas and ideologies. In order to find a true basis of harmony and peace, man must rise to a consciousness higher than the limited and ignorant mind and reason.

It is in the silent mind that the true consciousness can be built ; so the first thing that Yogic Sadhana does is to get a settled peace and silence in the mind.

But can the mind be ever made wholly silent ? Is not the mind thinking and acting even in

our sleep? Here we should make a distinction. Though almost always we find our mind full of thoughts and ideas, it is not always that we think or reason. We are often passive, and ideas rise in our mind we know not from where; they seem to have an independent life of their own—they arrange and form themselves in various ways, the mind in us remaining more or less in the position of a spectator or witness. As a matter of fact, our mind is like a public street where ideas come and go somewhat like wayfarers; some of them are disturbing, some are comparatively harmless, and they all leave traces behind, which have varying influences in forming our beliefs and opinions and moulding our lives and actions. But when we actively think or reason, we exercise a control over those ideas, reject those which are not wanted, and arrange others to arrive at some result or conclusion. When we can reject all the ideas completely, our mind becomes vacant and silent, and in that condition the Truth can manifest itself within us.

The proper function of the mind is not to think or reason, but to become a passive and silent channel of the truth that descends from above. By Yogic practice we have to cease to think,

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keeping our mind still, watching the ideas that come into us. If we can stop the ideas when they are about to enter into us, we can make our mind completely silent. "This can be done best if you keep a strong will. That will is the will of the Purusha behind the mind; when the mind is at peace, when it is silent one can become aware of the Purusha, silent also, separate from the action of the nature. To be calm, steady, *dhira sthira*, this quietude of the mind, this separation of the inner Purusha from the outer Prakriti is very helpful, almost indispensable. So long as the being is subject to the whirl of thoughts or the turmoil of the vital movements one cannot be thus calm and fixed in the spirit. To detach oneself, to stand back from them, to feel them separate from oneself is indispensable." "A mind that has achieved this calmness can begin to act, even intensely and powerfully, but it will keep its fundamental stillness—originating nothing from itself but receiving from Above and giving it a mental form without adding anything of its own, calmly, dispassionately, though with the joy of the Truth and the happy power and light of its passage." (*Bases of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo)

II

Yoga is practical psychology which aims at the perfection of man; it is the inner practice of all true religion. The technique of Yoga which Sri Aurobindo has developed in his Asram at Pondicherry is unique. It contains the essential force of the ancient spiritual disciplines, but goes beyond them towards their fulfilment. Yoga, as generally understood, takes man away from life into seclusion and asceticism. That however is not the object of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga; he sees the imperfections of the present life of humanity as much as the ancient Yogis, but his Yoga does not run away from life in search of perfection, it seeks to remedy its ills and imperfections so that human life may be turned into something divine. "The very first lesson in this Yoga is to face life and its trials with a quiet mind, a firm courage and an entire reliance on the Divine Shakti."

In ancient Yogas the sadhaka has to proceed by his own effort and *tapasya* following various methods such as Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Tantric rites. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga the only effort needed is to put oneself entirely into the hands

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of the Divine Mother. "To be a Yogi, a Sannyasi, a Tapaswi is not the object here. The object is transformation, and the transformation can only be done by a force infinitely greater than your own; it can only be done by being truly like a child in the hands of the Divine Mother." "The Divine presence, calm, peace, purity, force, light, joy, wideness are above waiting to descend in you. Find this quietude behind and your mind also will become quieter and through the quiet mind you can call down the descent first of the purity and peace and then of the Divine Force. If you can feel this peace and purity descending into you, you can then call it down again and again till it begins to settle; you will feel too the Force working in you to change the movements and transform the consciousness. In this working you will be aware of the presence and power of the Mother. Once that is done, all the rest will be a question of time and of the progressive evolution in you of your true and divine nature."

There is a tendency now-a-days to reorganise human life and society on the basis of the knowledge of human nature furnished by modern psychology, and that is certainly a move in the

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right direction; but as yet the new psychology has not been able to go very deep. "I find it difficult," says Sri Aurobindo, "to take these psycho-analysts at all seriously when they try to scrutinise spiritual experience by the flicker of their torch-lights,—yet perhaps one ought to, for half-knowledge is a powerful thing and can be a great obstacle to the coming in front of the true Truth. This new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a-b-c-d of the subconscious and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t cat, t-r-e-e tree) is the very heart of the real knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher lights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of these things is above and not below. The super-conscious, not the subconscious, is the true foundation of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is besides

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poor, dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the promise of the greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing."

Psycho-analysis shows that the lower passions in man, his desire, lust, greed, anger, envy, jealousy, sadism, masochism are inherent in human nature; if you repress them they will not be killed, they will remain hidden in the subconscious biding their time; or if the repression be too much, it will kill the life-force itself. Thus the conclusion is that if the human race is to live and prosper, it must give free play to its lower passions. That is the philosophy which underlies the militarism which is rampant in the world to-day. The Germans have openly said that a race can be kept strong and virile only by war and the preparation for war; and all the other nations of the world seem to follow the same philosophy whether they admit it or not. And it cannot be denied that there is some truth in it. Look at the history of ancient Greece, it became too civilised and perished; look at the fate of India with her teaching of non-violence and the

rigorous repression of the life-impulses in the pursuit of a higher moral and spiritual life. Thus psycho-analysis affirms that there is a limit beyond which human civilisation cannot progress. Whatever changes you may bring about in the external organisation of life, in the modes of government and the methods of production and distribution, as long as there are the passions of lust, greed etc. in human nature, there will be oppression, exploitation and war; and if humanity succeed in killing these impulses, it will commit successful suicide.

Human social and political endeavour turns always in a circle and leads nowhere; man's life and nature remain always the same, always imperfect, and neither laws nor institutions nor education nor philosophy nor morality nor religious teachings have succeeded in producing the perfect man, still less a perfect humanity,—straighten the tail of the dog as you will, it has been said, it always resumes its natural curve of crookedness. Altruism, philanthropy and service, Christian love or Buddhist compassion have not made the world a whit happier, they only give infinitesimal bits of momentary relief here and there, throw drops on the fire of the world's suffering. All aims are in the end transitory and futile, all

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achievements unsatisfying or evanescent ; all works are so much labour of effort and success and failure which consummate nothing definitive : whatever changes are made in human life are of the form only and these forms pursue each other in a futile circle ; for the essence of life, its general character remains the same for ever.” This view of things, however, is exaggerated, though it has an undeniable force and is supported by the experience of man’s centuries. Sri Aurobindo does not accept this view of human life as ultimate. What is wrong with the pacifists and moralists is not the ideal they have held before man, but their method of establishing a reign of peace and harmony merely by preaching non-violence and educating the mind of man. For the passions which are responsible for war and other evils of human life have their deep root in the subconscious, and over that part of our being the mind and the reason have little or no control. That is why men often commit sins even against their will, and nations go to war in spite of themselves. “The action of the subconscious is irrational, mechanical, repetitive. It does not listen to reason or the mental will. It is only by bringing the higher

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light and force into it that it can change." Yoga shows the true method of purifying the subconscious and rooting out these poisonous herbs from human nature and laying there the foundation of a truly spiritual divine life full of peace, harmony, light, power, beauty, love and joy. When individuals succeed in doing this they will exercise a spiritual influence on others and gradually over whole humanity; human life, human society will then find a stable basis in the spirit, and the dream of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth will be fulfilled.

THE DIVINE MOTHER : AS REVEALED TO SRI AUROBINDO

THE Arya Publishing House has brought out the second edition of *The Mother*, that great work of Sri Aurobindo, which gives us not only a glimpse of his Yoga and its aim but a picture of the Goddess that India has been worshipping under various names.

The aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, it may be recalled, is nothing short of the integral transformation of human nature and the creation of a new divine humanity on the earth. "The Supramental change," says Sri Aurobindo, "is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. But that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is needed the call from below with a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and

power of the Divine Mother. The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda."

The Indian mind has always made the attempt to look beyond the appearances of the physical world and through its own inner experiences to the godheads, powers, self-existence of the One of whom the sages speak variously—the famous phrase of the Veda, *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*. The worship of these various gods and goddesses, according to one's nature and capacity, is regarded by the Indians as a preliminary preparation for the integral knowledge of the One and the highest spiritual realisation. But many myths and legends have grown round these godheads, and in the popular religions the original spiritual vision has been clouded. Sri Aurobindo has given in this book a soul-stirring description of the Divine Mother, as revealed to him in the highest Yogic vision.

"The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates.

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But something of her ways can be seer and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures." "Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play." "Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhutis and shall found in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother. To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati."

These great names are familiar enough to the Indians, but they generally have very vague ideas about their respective nature and function. Sri Aurobindo's delineation raises before our eyes vivid and concrete pictures of the four Aspects of the Mother and makes them living and near to us. Here is a part of his description of Mahakali :

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"There is in her an overwhelming intensity, a mighty passion of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle. All her divinity leaps out in a splendour of tempestuous action; she is there for swiftness, for the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it. Terrible is her face to the Asura, dangerous and ruthless her mood against the haters of the Divine; for she is the Warrior of the worlds who never shrinks from the battle."

• "Her spirit is tameless, her vision and will are high and far-reaching like the flight of an eagle, her feet are rapid on the upward way and her hands are outstretched to strike and to succour." "When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilise or the enemies that assail the seeker." "But for her what is done in a day might have taken centuries." "Nothing can satisfy her that falls short of the supreme ecstasies, the highest heights, the noblest aims, the largest vistas. Therefore with her is the victorious force of the Divine and it is by grace of her fire and passion and speed if the great achievement can be done now rather than hereafter."

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The transformation of this mortal nature is difficult enough and no Yoga is easy to practise. But in Sri Aurobindo's system it is turned into a thing of joy and beauty through the worship of Mahalakshmi, the sweetest aspect of the Divine Mother. It wants to create conditions so that Mahalakshmi may exercise her happy influence and throw the spell of the intoxicating sweetness of the Divine. "Harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the thoughts and feelings, harmony and beauty in every outward act and movement, harmony and beauty of the life and surroundings, this is the demand of Mahalakshmi. Where there is affinity to the rhythms of the secret world-bliss and response to the call of the All-Beautiful and concord and unity and the glad flow of many lives turned towards the Divine, in that atmosphere she consents to abide. But all that is ugly and mean and base, all that is poor and sordid and squalid all that is brutal and coarse repels her advent." "Ascetic bareness and harshness are not pleasing to her nor the suppression of the heart's deeper emotions and the rigid repression of the soul's and the life's parts of beauty. For it is through love and beauty that she lays on men the yoke of the Divine."

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It is the Divine Power and no human endeavour that will free the godlike elements in us and shape all into an expression of Divine Nature; the only thing demanded from us is surrender. "If you desire this transformation, put yourself in the hands of the Mother and her Powers without cavil or resistance and let her do unhindered her work within you." Surrender to the Divine is the essential requirement in all spiritual disciplines; but Sri Aurobindo has shown how people delude themselves with false and partial views of surrender, and has clearly brought out its full implications. "There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and subterfuges, anything that revolts and refuses." "Note that a tamasic surrender refusing to fulfil the conditions and calling on God to do everything and save one all the trouble and struggle is a deception and does not lead to freedom and perfection."

Yoga, says the Gita, is the true skill in work. Sri Aurobindo clearly indicates how by surrender and Yoga one gradually reaches the state of a perfect divine worker. "All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme; your

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only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works." "All stress of egoistic choice, all hankering after personal profit, all stipulation of self-regarding desire must be extirpated from the nature." "By the force of your devotion your contact with the Divine Mother will become so intimate that at all times you will have only to concentrate and to put everything into her hands to have her present guidance, her direct command or impulse, the sure indication of the thing to be done and the way to do it and the result. And afterwards you will realise that the divine Shakti not only inspires and guides, but initiates and carries out your works; all your movements are originated by her, all your powers are hers, mind life and body are conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe. There can be no more happy condition than this union and dependence; for this step carries you back beyond the border-line from the life of stress and suffering in the ignorance into the truth of your spiritual being, into its deep peace and its intense Ananda."

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Written in simple, elegant, poetical prose, *The Mother* is not mere poetry or philosophy, it is a spiritual revelation of a direct and profound character such as one meets in the Vedas and the Upanishads.

SRI AUROBINDO AND MODERN ENGLISH POETRY

“SIX poems of Sri Aurobindo”¹ marks a distinctly new step in the evolution of modern poetry. In poetry, as in all departments of life, all sorts of experiments are going on to-day, and old order is giving place to new. Young poets all over the world feel impelled to use a new language and a new technique as a vehicle for new ideas. But the forms that have emerged so far show a tendency towards chaos rather than new creation. In modern English poetry, rhyme is being freely dispensed with, and there are many who even dispense with rhythm, which is the essence of all pattern-making in poetry. And the language they use has led people to say, “These new verse-writers have turned poetry into a cross between the noise of an underground railway and the tower of Babel.” Here is rather an extreme example:

¹ *Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo*. With translation in Bengali. Published by Rameswar & Co., Chandernagore.

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It is a jazz affair, drum crashes and cornet
razes.

The trombone pony neighs and the tuba
jackass snorts.

The banjo tickles and titters too awful.

The chippies talk about the funnies in the
papers.

The cartoonists weep in their beer,

Ship riveters talk with their feet,

To the feet of floozies under the tables.

A quarter of white hopes mourn with inters-
persed snickers:

I got the blues.

I got the blues.

I got the blues.

And, as we said earlier:

The cartoonists weep in their beer.

The excuse of these young poets is that they want to write about the actual events of living in the speech that the people use in the streets. "Revolutionary ideas," says Mr. Day Lewis (author of 'Time to Dance,' etc.), "shake up our minds like an earthquake and they alter the contour of the language." Stars and nightingales and roses have become hackneyed, so the young poets write about Pylons and factories, railways, airplanes and

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disputed frontiers. "We write about new life," says an American poet, "we feel that new life will come from the working classes: inevitably we write about them." A poet has certainly to write in a language which people understand about things which they understand. Still poetry is not the language which people use in the streets. It is the work of the poet to find the hidden power and beauty of the spoken language and use it not merely to express the superficial life of the people but to reveal the deep underlying forces which actually shape that life. In an age of science and machinery, it is natural for poets to write about them, and a true original poet will always be able to make poetry as much out of a sunset as out of a steam-engine. Thus Stephen Spender's lines on *The Express* are genuine poetry:

But gliding like the queen she leaves the
station.

Without bowing and with restrained unconcern
She passes the houses which humbly crowd
outside,

The gasworks, and at last the heavy page
Of Death, printed by gravestones in the
cemetery.

But poetry of the higher order is made only when the outward things are used as symbols to give expression to the deepest truths of life. Steam-engines, airplanes and skyscrapers are symbols of the mastery of man over external nature; but there is a greater victory waiting for him; the victory over his inner nature, over greed and passion, ignorance and falsehood, which make life full of misery in spite of all the conquests of science and machinery, and the Five Year Plans and New Deals. Sri Aurobindo's poetry is an expression of the deepest spiritual experiences, which alone can give the true meaning to human life and lead it to its fulfilment. Man is on the point of making a great victory, of taking the next higher step in his evolution, and Sri Aurobindo stands as the seer-poet of that victorious march of mankind to its destiny of a spiritual divine life on the earth.

As regards the forms of poetry, if the old metrical forms are no longer adequate, new ones have to be evolved. In fact, every age has its contribution in new patterns and new rhythms in poetry. But the way is not to dispense with poetical rhythm altogether as the writers of free verse are trying to do. Poetry without rhythm

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is a contradiction in terms. Rhyme is in a different category, since it is not essential to poetry; but only those can afford to dispense with it, who can give their rhythm that additional strength which is needed to hold unrhymed verse together, strength obtained by close-packed thought and a careful choice of words and, above all, by harmonious variations in the rhythm. In *Horis Æternum*, Sri Aurobindo aims at finding a halfway house between free verse and regular metrical poetry:

A far sail on the unchangeable monotone of
a slow slumbering sea,

A world of power hushed into symbols of
hue, silent unendingly.

"It is an attempt," as he himself says, "to avoid the chaotic amorphousness of free verse and keep to a regular form based on the fixed number of stresses in each line and part of a line while yet there shall be a great plasticity and variety in all the other elements of poetic rhythm, the number of syllables, the management of the feet, if any, the distribution of the stress-beats, the changing modulation of the rhythm." The author calls it a very simple and elementary model which he developed further in *The*

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Bird of Fire, where the stanza is of four lines, alternately of twelve and ten stresses. Here are two typical lines :

Rich and red is thy breast, O bird, like
blood of a soul climbing the hard crag-
teeth world, wounded and nude,

A ruby of flame-petalled love in the silver-
gold altar-vase of moon-edged night and
rising day.

There are two other metrical experiments in the volume. In *Trance*, Sri Aurobindo has found an altogether new rhythm in English poetry using the old classical quantitative foot-measures. It is a four-line stanza; in the first line two amphibrachs are followed by a cretic, in the second line the first foot is a cretic, the second an amphibrach and the last an anapaest. Here is one stanza :

My mind is awake in stirless trance,
Hushed my heart, a burden of delight ;
Dispelled is the senses' flicker-dance,
Mute the body aureate with light.

This metre is suited only for a brief lyrical poem. So in *Shiva* and *The Life Heavens* he has introduced an ample number of modulations which allow a fairly free variation of the rhythm

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without destroying the consistence of the underlying rhythmic measure. In *Jivanmukta* Sri Aurobindo has shown the possibilities of Alcaics in English poetry. The subject is the Vedantic ideal of the living liberated man:

He acts and lives. Vain things are mind's
smaller motives

To one whose soul enjoys for its high
possession

Infinity and the sempiternal

All is his guide and beloved and refuge.
This is perhaps for the first time in English poetry that Alcaics have been used with such success.

The methods employed by Sri Aurobindo do not "tend to make poetry a kind of culture artificially fostered in a laboratory." His poems come from the very depths of Reality and constitute the essence of poetry. Though he expresses spiritual experiences, he does not merely philosophise in verse. It is not at all easy to write poetry which will be a transcript of a spiritual condition. "If one writes only ideas about what it is or should be, there is a failure. There must be something concrete, the form, the essential spiritual emotion of the state. The words chosen

must be the right words in their proper place and each part of the statement in its place in an inevitable whole. Verbiage, flourishes there must be none." As a matter of fact, spiritual poetry succeeded nowhere except in the great Upanishads and in some passages of the Gita. Thus the Upanishad speaks of the Eternal Reality which it calls the Brahman :

The Eternal is hidden in a glorious golden sheath, the indivisible and stainless Spirit, and He is a brightness and the light of all lights and the One that self-knowers know.

There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind ; there these lightnings flash not, nor any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth.

All is this eternal and immortal Brahman. The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the south and to the north of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal.—'Mundaka Upanishad', *translated by Sri Aurobindo*.

The Upanishads speak of the Brahman in various ways, but their tendency is to take

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one away from life so that he may live in the immortal ecstasy of the Brahman consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo's ideal is the attainment of the Brahman consciousness as a means of conquering the evils in the world and the realisation of a divine life on this earth and in this material body. In *The Life Heavens*, Earth thus cries to the limitless Sublime:

I, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven;
My lonely sorrow surpasses its rose-joys,
A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven;—
My dumbness fills with echoes of a far Voice.

By me the last finite, yearning, strives
To reach the last infinity's unknown,
The Eternal is broken into fleeting lives
And Godhead pent in the mire and the stone.

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“AS there has been established on earth a mental Consciousness and Power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation.” It is this great truth of life, unknown before that Sri Aurobindo has revealed in his latest book, his *magnum opus*, called *The Life Divine*. Full of literary sublimities of classical excellence, this book will verily be the New Veda of Divine Life, which is Sri Aurobindo’s message to humanity. It indicates how conditions in Life and Nature are now not only favourable to, but are pressing for, the inevitable fulfilment of the highest spiritual aspirations of man through the emergence of divinised supermen and a life of integral harmony, of which Sri Aurobindo is the

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path-finder. He has spoken the Supreme Word, the Word that creates worlds. What is needed is readiness of man to accept it, and follow it to its consummate end.

It is not intended here, neither is it possible, to acquaint the reader of this little book with the vast and luminous structure of Sri Aurobindo's thought as presented in *The Life Divine*. We however give below just a few extracts which may help as glimpses of that magnificent work.

* * * *

To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, —this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. (Vol. I—p. 2)

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The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? (Vol. I—p. 5)

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We seek indeed a larger and completer affirmation. We perceive that in the Indian ascetic ideal the great Vedantic formula, "One without a second," has not been read sufficiently in the light of that other formula equally imperative, "All this is the Brahman." The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation. Its meaning in Matter has not been so well understood as Its truth in the Spirit. The Reality which the Sannyasin seeks has been grasped in its full height, but not, as by the ancient Vedantins, in its full extent and comprehensiveness. But in our completer affirmation we must not minimise the part of the pure spiritual impulse. As we have seen

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how greatly Materialism has served the ends of the Divine, so we must acknowledge the still greater service rendered by Asceticism to Life. We shall preserve the truths of material Science and its real utilities in the final harmony, even if many or even if all of its existing forms have to be broken or left aside. An even greater scruple of right preservation must guide us in our dealing with the legacy, however actually diminished or depreciated, of the Aryan past. (Vol. I—p. 36)

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Through Avidya, the Multiplicity, lies our path out of the transitional egoistic self-expression in which death and suffering predominate; through Vidya consenting with Avidya by the perfect sense of oneness even in that multiplicity, we enjoy integrally the immortality and the beatitude. By attaining to the Unborn beyond all becoming we are liberated from this lower birth and death; by accepting the Becoming freely as the Divine, we invade mortality with the immortal beatitude and become luminous centres of its conscious self-expression in humanity. (Vol. I—p. 63)

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World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly

to the view : it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be ; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing. (Vol. I—p. 119)

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The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being ; we ascend from Matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of supermind towards the divine being. The knot of the two, the higher and the lower hemisphere, is where mind and supermind meet with a veil between them. The rending of the veil is the condition of the divine life in humanity ; for by that rending, by the illumining descent of the higher into the nature of the lower being and the forceful ascent of the lower being into the nature of the higher, mind can recover its divine light in the all-comprehending supermind, the soul realise its divine self in the all-possessing, all-blissful Ananda, life repossess its divine power in the play of omnipotent Conscious-Force and Matter open to its divine liberty as a form of the divine Existence. And if there be any goal to the evolution which finds here its present crown and head

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in the human being other than an aimless circling and an individual escape from the circling, if the infinite potentiality of this creature who alone here stands between Spirit and Matter with the power to mediate between them, has any meaning other than an ultimate awakening from the delusion of life by despair and disgust of the cosmic effort and its complete rejection, then even such a luminous and puissant transfiguration and emergence of the Divine in the creature must be that high-uplifted goal and that supreme significance. (Vol. I—p. 404)

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As Life and Mind have been released in Matter, so too must in their time these greater powers of the concealed Godhead emerge from the involution and their supreme Light descend into us from above.

A divine Life in the manifestation is then not only possible as the high result and ransom of our present life in the Ignorance but, if these things are as we have seen them, it is the inevitable outcome and consummation of Nature's evolutionary endeavour. (Vol. I—p. 440-41)

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In the gnostic or divine being, in the gnostic life, there will be a close and complete consciousness of the self of others, a consciousness of their mind, life, physical being which are felt as if they were one's own. The gnostic being will act, not out of a surface sentiment of love and sympathy or any similar feeling, but out of this close mutual consciousness, this intimate oneness. All his action in the world will be enlightened by a truth of vision of what has to be done, a sense of the will of the Divine Reality in him which is also the Divine Reality in others, and it will be done for the Divine in others and the Divine in all, for the effectuation of the truth of purpose of the All as seen in the light of the highest Consciousness and in the way and by the steps through which it must be effectuated in the power of the Supernature. The gnostic being finds himself not only in his own fulfilment, which is the fulfilment of the Divine Being and Will in him, but in the fulfilment of others ; his universal individuality effectuates itself in the movement of the All in all beings towards its greater becoming. He sees a divine working everywhere ; what goes out from him into the sum of that divine working, from the inner Light, Will, Force that works

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in him, is his action. There is no separative ego in him to initiate anything; it is the Transcendent and Universal that moves out through his universalised individuality into the action of the universe. As he does not live for a separate ego, so too he does not live for the purpose of any collective ego; he lives in and for the Divine in himself, in and for the Divine in the collectivity, in and for the Divine in all beings. This universality in action, organised by the all-seeing Will in the sense of the realised oneness of all, is the law of his divine living. (Vol. II—p. 1124-25)

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Our nature, our consciousness is that of beings ignorant of each other, separated from each other, rooted in a divided ego, who must strive to establish some kind of relation between their embodied ignorances; for the urge to union and forces making for union are there in Nature. Individual and group harmonies of a comparative and qualified completeness are created, a social cohesion is accomplished; but in the mass the relations formed are constantly marred by imperfect sympathy, imperfect understanding, gross misunderstandings, strife, discord, unhappiness. It cannot be otherwise so long as there is no true

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union of consciousness founded upon a nature of self-knowledge, inner mutual knowledge, inner realisation of unity, concord of our inner forces of being and inner forces of life. In our social building we labour to establish some approach to unity, mutuality, harmony, because without these things there can be no perfect social living; but what we build is a constructed unity, an association of interests and egos enforced by law and custom and imposing an artificial constructed order in which the interests of some prevail over the interests of others and only a half accepted half enforced, half natural half artificial accommodation keeps the social whole in being. Between community and community there is a still worse accommodation with a constant recurrence of the strife of collective ego with collective ego. This is the best that we can do and all our persistent readjustments of the social order can bring us nothing better than an imperfect structure of life.

It is only if our nature develops beyond itself, if it becomes a nature of self-knowledge, mutual understanding, unity, a nature of true being and true life that the result can be a perfection of ourselves and our existence, a life of true being, a

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life of unity, mutuality, harmony, a life of true happiness, a harmonious and beautiful life. (Vol. II—p. 1131-32)

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A perfected community also can exist only by the perfection of its individuals, and perfection can come only by the discovery and affirmation in life by each of his own spiritual being and the discovery by all of their spiritual unity and a resultant life unity. There can be no real perfection for us except by our inner self and truth of spiritual existence taking up all truth of the instrumental existence into itself and giving to it oneness, integration, harmony. As our only real freedom is the discovery and disengagement of the spiritual Reality within us, so our only means of true perfection is the sovereignty and self-effectuation of the spiritual Reality in all the elements of our nature. (Vol. II—p. 1156)

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At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others

it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would

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intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being: but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. At the same time Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal. The evolution of human mind and

life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. Man has harmonised life in the past by organised ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them. Reason and science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-

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knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.

A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a re-shaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way. (Vol. II—p. 1159-62)

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There is the possibility that in the swing back from a mechanistic idea of life and society the human mind may seek refuge in a return to the religious idea and a society governed or sanctioned by religion. But organised religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed

human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being; it could insist only on a credal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to institution, ceremony and ritual. Religion so conceived can give a religio-ethical colour or surface tinge,—sometimes, if it maintains a strong kernel of inner experience, it can generalise to some extent an incomplete spiritual tendency; but it does not transform the race, it cannot create a new principle of the human existence. A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself. Another possible conception akin to the religious solution is the guidance of society by men of spiritual attainment, the brotherhood or unity of all in the faith or in the discipline, the spiritualisation of life and society by the taking up of the old machinery of life into such a unification or inventing a new machinery. This too has been attempted before without success; it was the original founding idea of more than one religion: but the human ego and vital nature were too strong for a religious idea working

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on the mind and by the mind to overcome its resistance. It is only the full emergence of the soul,¹ the full descent of the native light and power of the Spirit and the consequent replacement or transformation and uplifting of our insufficient mental and vital nature by a spiritual and supramental supernature that can effect this evolutionary miracle.

At first sight this insistence on a radical change of nature might seem to put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future; for the transcendence of our normal human nature, a transcendence of our mental, vital and physical being, has the appearance of an endeavour too high and difficult and at present, for man as he is, impossible. Even if it were so, it would still remain the sole possibility for the transmutation of life; for to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition; it is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle. But what is demanded by this change is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible; for what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it: what evolu-

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tionary Nature presses for, is an awakening to the knowledge of self, the discovery of self, the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and the release of its self-knowledge, its self-power, its native self-instrumentation. It is, besides, a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation and which is brought closer at each crisis of human destiny when the mental and vital evolution of the being touches a point where intellect and vital force reach some acme of tension and there is a need either for them to collapse, to sink back into a torpor of defeat or a repose of unprogressive quiescence or to rend their way through the veil against which they are straining. What is necessary is that there should be a turn in humanity felt by some or many towards the vision of this change, a feeling of its imperative need, the sense of its possibility, the will to make it possible in themselves and to find the way. That trend is not absent and it must increase with the tension of the crisis in human world-destiny; the need of an escape or a solution, the feeling that there is no other solution than the spiritual cannot but grow and become more imperative under the urgency of critical circumstance. To that call in the being

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there must always be some answer in the Divine Reality and in Nature.

The answer might indeed be only individual ; it might result in a multiplication of spiritualised individuals or even, conceivably though not probably, a gnostic individual or individuals isolated in the unspiritualised mass of humanity. Such isolated realised beings must either withdraw into their secret divine kingdom and guard themselves in a spiritual solitude or act from their inner light on mankind for what little can be prepared in such conditions for a happier future. The inner change can begin to take shape in a collective form only if the gnostic individual finds others who have the same kind of inner life as himself and can form with them a group with its own autonomous existence or else a separate community or order of beings with its own inner law of life. It is this need of a separate life with its own rule of living adapted to the inner power or motive force of the spiritual existence and creating for it its native atmosphere that has expressed itself in the past in the formation of the monastic life or in attempts of various kinds at a new separate collective living self-governed and other in its spiritual principle than the

ordinary human life. The monastic life is in its nature an association of other-worldly seekers, men whose whole attempt is to find and realise in themselves the spiritual reality and who form their common existence by rules of living which help them in that endeavour. It is not usually an effort to create a new life-formation which will exceed the ordinary human society and create a new world-order. A religion may hold that eventual prospect before it or attempt some first approach to it, or a mental idealism may make the same endeavour. But these attempts have always been overcome by the persistent inconscience and ignorance of our human vital nature ; for that nature is an obstacle which no mere idealism or incomplete spiritual aspiration can change in its recalcitrant mass or permanently dominate. Either the endeavour fails by its own imperfection or it is invaded by the imperfection of the outside world and sinks from the shining height of its aspiration to something mixed and inferior on the ordinary human level. A common spiritual life meant to express the spiritual and not the mental, vital and physical being must found and maintain itself on greater values than the mental, vital, physical values of the ordi-

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nary human society ; if it is not so founded, it will be merely the normal human society with a difference. An entirely new consciousness in many individuals transforming their whole being, transforming their mental, vital and physical nature-self, is needed for the new life to appear ; only such a transformation of the general mind, life, body nature can bring into being a new worth-while collective existence. The evolutionary nîsus must tend not merely to create a new type of mental beings but another order of beings who have raised there whole existence from our present mentalised animality to a greater spiritual level of the earth-nature. (Vol. II—p. 1167-72)

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This new status would indeed be a reversal of the present law of human consciousness and life, for it would reverse the whole principle of the life of the Ignorance. It is for the taste of the Ignorance, its surprise and adventure, one might say, that the soul has descended into the Inconscience and assumed the disguise of Matter, for the adventure and the joy of creation and discovery, an adventure of the spirit, an adventure of the mind and life and the hazardous surprises of their working in Matter, for the discovery

and conquest of the new and the unknown; all this constitutes the enterprise of life and all this, it might seem, would cease with the cessation of the Ignorance. Man's life is made up of the light and the darkness, the gains and losses, the difficulties and dangers, the pleasures and pains of the Ignorance, a play of colours moving on a soil of the general neutrality of Matter which has as its basis the nescience and insensibility of the Inconscient. ~~To the normal~~ life-being an existence without the reactions of success and frustration, vital joy and grief, peril and passion, pleasure and pain, the vicissitudes and uncertainties of fate and struggle and battle and endeavour, a joy of novelty and surprise and creation projecting itself into the unknown might seem to be void of variety and therefore void of vital savour. Any life surpassing these things tends to appear to it as something featureless and empty or cast in the figure of an immutable sameness; the human mind's picture of heaven is the incessant repetition of an eternal monotone. But this is a misconception; for an entry into the gnostic consciousness would be an entry into the Infinite. It would be a self-creation bringing out the Infinite infi-

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nately into form of being, and the interest of the Infinite is much greater and multitudinous as well as more imperishably delightful than the interest of the finite. The evolution in the Knowledge would be a more beautiful and glorious manifestation with more vistas ever unfolding themselves and more intensive in all ways than any evolution could be in the Ignorance. The delight of the Spirit is ever new, the forms of beauty it takes innumerable, its godhead ever young and the taste of delight, *rasa*, of the Infinite eternal and inexhaustible. The gnostic manifestation of life would be more full and fruitful and its interest more vivid than the creative interest of the Ignorance; it would be a greater and happier constant miracle.

If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. The self, the spirit, the reality that is disclosing itself out of the first inconscience of life and matter, would evolve its complete truth of being

and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself—or, if its end as an individual is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also,—not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life. Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature. (p. 1183—86)

